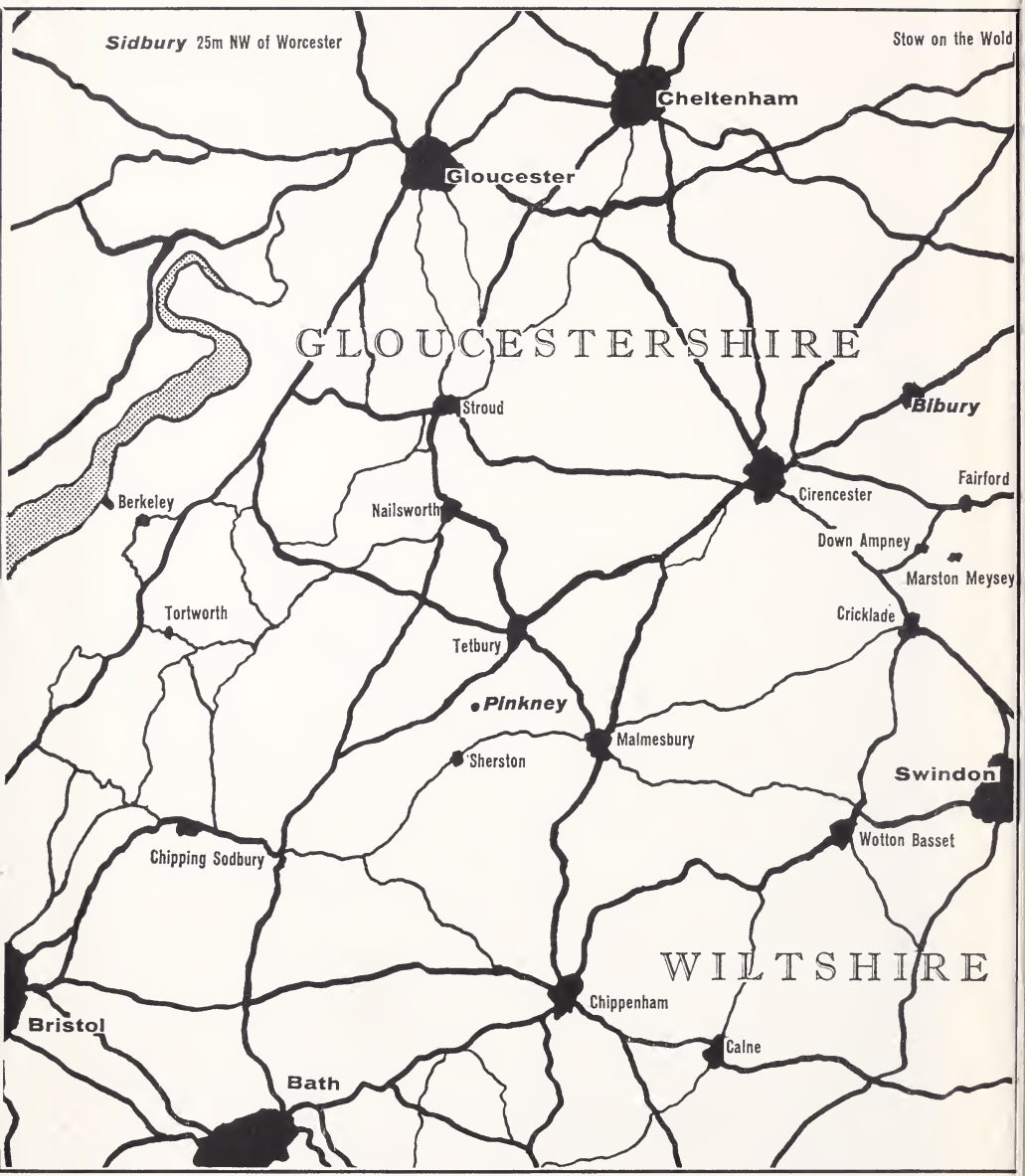
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Tortworth
Cricklade
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The Web of
FORTUNE

Pinkney showing the Piazza

. . . here we met, here we talked, here we kissed and toyed, till the cold weather came on and prevented us.

The Web of
FORTUNE

THE NARRATIVE OF
AN ENGLISH FAMILY FROM
THE TWELFTH TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

GWLADYS CAMPBELL

'For each age is a dream that is dying
Or one that is coming to birth.'
O'Shaughnessy 1844–81

'Those who wish to create a future may not
lose sight of the past. . . .'
Paul Kruger's last letter,
29th June 1904
to General Botha and his People.

NEVILLE SPEARMAN
LONDON 1965

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To My Great Grandfather—The Baby in the Riding Boot

Preface

TO THE BEST of my knowledge this narrative is 'true history'.

The facts are derived from verified family records at Charingworth Manor, Wills and other public documents, or from the sources listed in the bibliography.

It could not have been written without the kind co-operation of the late Herbert Cresswell Esq. M.B.E. of Charingworth Manor Glos. and of his son Major E. R. Cresswell M.C., XV, XIX The King's Royal Hussars; John Reed Esq. of Sidbury Hall, Salop.; the Rev. Cresswell Naesmyth of Posso; and Mrs Howard Thompson of Coton Hall, Salop.

I am also much indebted to Lt.-Col. Sir John Corbet Bt of Acton Reynald, Salop.; Robert Cresswell Palmer Esq. of Kloof, Natal; Dr John Mason of Christ Church, Oxford; Dr H. M. C. Corfield F.F.A.R.C.S., and to many kind archivists and librarians, notably those of Glos. and Wilts. Record Offices and the British Museum.

GWLADYS CAMPBELL

Waulkmill—Redgorton
Perthshire.

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CHAPTER ONE

Bilbrook and Barnhurst

Time like an ever-rolling stream
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

EVEN SO; but this familiar verse stresses only one facet of the jewel of truth, for science in this century has taught us that the stream is composed of waves of light and sound on which we are imprinting the patterns of our lives—a sobering thought when already the present can be captured, so that in years to come it may be possible to tune in and reproduce the past—a future answer perhaps to crime.

'Human lives,' wrote the late Lord Geddes, 'bear a relation to the branching stem of human life analogous to that borne by leaves to the particular branch on which they hang. The branching stem of human life represented in the analogy by a tree trunk and its branches, is a stream of living matter and a conjoined, continuing, psychic stream passing on through generation after generation.'

The emphasis in this narrative is on that continuity but its purpose in tracing the particular stream of an English family is to illustrate, by following its curious course, the consistent change of scene and circumstance, even between father and son, as each generation passes on its way and new lives create new designs that none the less are conditioned by the past and themselves produce the gossamer from which is spun the web of their descendants' fortune.

Many generations are needed for this theme and the Cresswell family provide an authentic pedigree of sufficient length. They were typical English landed gentry of 'private station' as it was termed in the eighteenth century, but their story contains some unusual features.

It does not, however, begin with Adam, as do the pedigrees of some of the old Welsh families, laboriously recorded in 1711 'per the Antiquities' by a learned genealogist in Biblical fashion.

His route from Adam, generation by generation, was via Seth, Enoch who walked with God, Methusaleh and Noah. Then from Noah's son Japheth on and on to Anchises and Aeneas Prince of Troy (Troy was sacked *circa* 1250 B.C.) and thence to Brutus 'yt first King that trode upon this Island' and on through three and a half centuries of Roman occupation to the early Celtic-Roman-Britons from whom the Welsh descend.

The Cresswells settled for the Norman Conquest, a mere 900 years ago, because the English family of Cresswell was undoubtedly of Norman origin—which in itself indicates an already developed spirit of adventure.

Different threads are followed in the narrative. Heredity, loves, vicissitudes and fate are interwoven with the history of their houses, the whole being merged into the English scene in which they have played their part since Henry II reigned in England 800 years ago.

Looking back on the misty past the colours glow brightest in the year 1800, at the peak of their prosperity—a romantic age as it now appears to us—and in fact a golden one for rural England, when agriculture was thriving, good food was in abundance and there was no scarcity of labour and no loneliness in country places.

Squires were as prosperous, as privileged and powerful as the modern business tycoon; and life was still entirely dependent on the horse.

Hunting and racing were favoured pastimes and good stables a status symbol. The old order had not yet changed and the birth pangs of a new one had hardly begun.

But perhaps of more perennial interest is the love story of fifty years earlier; and over it all hangs the unsolved mystery of the Pinkney Skull.

The Staffordshire family of Cresswell first emerged into English history in 1166, a date easy to remember, 100 years after the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest.

Thomas de Cresswell, Sheriff of Staffordshire in 1166, was probably a knight in the retinue of the Norman Lord of Stafford.

A Norman sheriff administered the royal estates in his shire, collected the taxes, presided at its court, receiving writs and making records, and led the shire militia in time of war or rebellion, thus linking the Crown with the forces of local patriotism and self-interest, which encouraged national unity.

William the Conqueror had kept one-fifth of his new territory for himself and given one quarter to the Church and had distributed practically all the remainder among his 170 chief Norman and French followers, nearly half of it going to only ten men.

Strictly defined terms of military service were attached to every grant and his tenants-in-chief, including bishops and abbots, had to swear support with a fixed number of mounted and armoured knights and also pay specified dues and attend royal courts and assemblies.

To meet their commitments they in turn farmed out their lands on similar terms to professional knights or fighting men as their vassals.

A fief could not be broken up or sold without consent and on its holder's death the heir paid a death duty and did homage and could then succeed. Failure to perform military service spelt forfeiture to the overlord.

These French-speaking barons—all closely interrelated—and five or six thousand knights thus became the principal landholders of England and formed a new ruling class.

Henry I was the next great administrator and during his reign of thirty-five years he organized a permanent officialdom at Westminster with a staff of trained clerks. This was the birth of the Civil Service. His influence was felt all over the country, in every county, where sheriffs were kept perpetually busy under supervision from Westminster.

England suffered the set-back of civil war during Stephen's reign and then, amid general rejoicing, Henry II was crowned in 1154. Aged twenty-one, he was the richest ruler in Europe—Henry Plantagenet, son of Geoffrey of Anjou and Matilda of

England, ruler of Normandy and of Anjou, Maine and Touraine, newly married to Eleanor of Aquitaine, twelve years his senior and the richest heiress in Europe.

Henry II pulled England together again. He re-established the Civil Service and organized a new judiciary with law courts and juries, choosing his men carefully from the lesser Norman and Anglo-Norman families and using them as a counterpoise to feudal magnates. Nor did he neglect the military aspect for he issued an ordinance named the Assize of Arms defining the ancient obligation of every free man to serve in it and the scale of equipment required of him. He was a man of driving energy that made him a terror to his contemporaries.

In 1166 he convened his Great Council at Clarendon, his Wiltshire hunting lodge or palace, and the principal subject under discussion was the urgent need to improve the administration of justice.

He then crossed the Channel to subjugate Brittany and was away four years.

On his return he held another meeting of the Great Council on 11th June 1170 in London to hear reports on the sheriffs, and proceeded to discharge twenty-two out of twenty-nine whom he had already suspended from office until the investigations were completed.

The King replaced these sheriffs, who were mostly local magnates, with his own men who had had technical training in law and finance and would be directly under his control.

Neither Benedict of Peterborough nor Gervase of Canterbury gave the names of those rejected or appointed, so Thomas de Cresswell's fate is not known. As a Norman he may have got by or he may have been one of the King's new men and was therefore able to establish his family.

Various authorities are agreed that he gave his name to the village of Cresswell near Stafford and was certainly its owner in 1166 and the founder of the family that for several generations lived there.

Traditionally Cresswell Hall was the family seat from 1154–1313. In the course of centuries it became a stately mansion but was demolished in 1920 owing to dry-rot. The ruins of its Norman church were close by.

According to the Wm. Salt Collections Cresswell stood on Domesday (1086) as a manor of one hide and in that group of manors which were held by William Pantulf of Wem under the Earl of Shrewsbury and 'to Cresswell was attached a burgage (masura) in Stafford, but it was waste'. 'Waste' was a grim word denoting devastated property no longer having any tax capacity. A hide of land varied in different parts of the country from forty-eight to 120 acres but was more commonly the latter.

It was the arable land of a holding sufficient to support the family and was roughly what an eight-ox team could plough in a year.

Thomas de Cresswell's heraldic device was the red squirrel. His arms were azure, three plates each charged with a squirrel gules (red) sitting up and cracking a nut or.

These exact arms descended to Cresswells in the neighbouring county of Leicestershire, said by Burke to have been resident landowners from the time of Richard I, who would therefore have derived from the same Norman family and been a senior line to that of this narrative.

In the course of time an upper middle class emerged in England, composed mainly of the descendants of the Norman knights who were recruited for administrative purposes. As their military functions fell into abeyance they paid scutage in lieu of service in the field and their fiefs became hereditary property. Instead of being just professional soldiers they gradually became landed gentlemen with official responsibilities.

They performed many duties in the shires, serving on the new juries of the Grand Assize and in the 'oversight' of the royal forests and gave testimony on oath in the periodical inquests of kings and sheriffs. Though still mainly of Norman descent, name and speech, they intermingled increasingly with the wealthier English freemen and land-holders and with the Anglo-Norman traders of London. The great Gloucestershire family of Berkeley originated in this way.

The next Cresswell record is of another Thomas who was a juror in Stafford in 1247 and in 1286 the head of the family was Sir Henry de Cresswell. He was the coroner and a prominent man in the affairs of the county and in 1300 was one of the Staffordshire knights appointed to fix the boundaries of the

royal Forest of Kinver. Co-jurors were Sir William Wrottesley, Sir Hugh Mauveyisn, Sir Hugh Weston and others, all influential people.

The records prove Sir Henry had a brother Thomas, who sometime before 1307 acquired an estate at Bilbrook in Tettenhall parish, south of Stafford. He was mentioned on a Plea Roll of that year as a juror of Tettenhall and he accompanied his brother on the Perambulation of Kinver Forest.

It was this Thomas who founded the Cresswell family of Bilbrook and Barnhurst, subsequently land-owners in Shropshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, who are the subject of this narrative.

He was a soldier by profession who served the King in Scotland and in France and was one of the Staffordshire knights who appeared at Westminster in answer to the King's Writ and Call to Arms, issued from York in 1324.

The King was then Edward II, a weak ruler, dominated by favourites. His war in Scotland had proved disastrous, culminating in the Battle of Bannockburn (24th June 1314) by which Robert the Bruce won independence for his country.

Thomas Earl of Lancaster had secured control until he was put to death in 1322—then the Despencers became supreme, until ousted in their turn by Queen Isabella and Roger de Mortimer. Hugh le Despencer, favourite of Edward II, was hanged two years later in 1326. He was an ancestor of Elizabeth Estcourt who brought Pinkney Park into the Cresswell family.

Thomas de Cresswell is assumed to have acquired his Bilbrook estate by marriage, which could only have been into one of the two families who owned all the land. The oldest, named after the place descended from the freemen mentioned in Domesday Book and the other of equal importance was the family of Barnhurst. Henry de Barnhurst was a co-juror with Thomas de Cresswell and William Bilbrook and had a daughter called Agnes. Another Roll gave the name of Thomas de Cresswell's wife as Agnes and if she was Henry de Barnhurst's daughter it would explain the Cresswells settling in Bilbrook.

The estate was not of great value. The Subsidy Roll of 6 Ed. III gave him as a tenant of the Manor of Tettenhall with an assessment for taxation of 1s. 6d. As other tenants were assessed

at amounts varying from 1s. 9d. to 2s. 10d. his holding could not have been large. The assessment was one-fifteenth of all possessions not personal.

Every professional soldier longed for land of his own but the transition from early knighthood to gentility was a very gradual one. Thomas de Cresswell's name with that of his brother Sir Henry occurred many times on the Plea Rolls in the reign of Edward III and evidently they took an active part in the disturbances so frequent in Staffordshire at that time.

The unsettled condition of the country due to the deposition and murder of Edward II and the intrigues of his widow and Roger de Mortimer made it easy for the more powerful landowners to terrorize and rob those who were weaker. The Plea Rolls were full of reports of illegal assemblies, charges of murder, arson and personal violence. Every family in Staffordshire was more or less involved and the practice appeared to be that the defendants bailed each other out, while the chief offenders received the King's Pardon on condition of joining his army and fighting in Scotland or France.

The Cresswells were no better than anyone else.

In 1326 two of the King's justices were appointed to enquire into these 'illicit assemblies, homicides, depredations etc.' and at the Assizes held at Stafford in March of that year, the jurors said:

> On Thursday before the Feast of St Cedde, 19 Ed. II (1326) after the return of John de Ipstanes from Gascony, on the day that the County Court was held at Stafford, the said John de Ipstanes Knt, came with many others, including Henry de Cresswell and Thomas his brother, armed to the great terror of the people and that they congregated together in the same way in many other places against the King's Peace.

The jury further stated that Wm. de Ipstanes, Clerk, and others had come many times to Stafford and had ridden about the country to the terror of the people day and night.

> They say that Henry de Cresswell is a common malefactor and beater of men and that he had beaten and wounded Walter de Pystok and William de Astor of Stafford and that John de Salt of Cresswell and others are common malefactors and disturbers of the Peace and that Henry de Cresswell had exorted 12 marks from

Richard de Wentock not to beat him and had done the same by others. And the same John de Ipstanes and Henry de Cresswell appeared and did not deny the charges—they are therefore committed to the custody of the Sheriff.

Thomas de Cresswell appeared and stated that he frequently rode with his brother and others and put himself on the King's grace and was therefore remitted to prison in the custody of the Sheriff.

A further entry on the Rolls of 7 Ed. III (1334) recorded that the above Henry de Cresswell appeared in court and produced the King's Pardon, dated from York, 29th May 1327, which stated that the King pardoned him for all homicides, felonies, etc., perpetrated in the reign of his father King Edward on condition that he served in Scotland against the King's enemies.

Thomas de Cresswell was not so fortunate, for although he managed to get out of prison, and join his brother in Scotland, he was outlawed.

The process continued against him for ten years until Easter 1337 when he appeared in court and produced the King's Letters under his Privy Seal, addressed to the justices, which stated that the said Thomas had been detained in the mountains of Scotland by the King's Command in the retinue of the King of the Scots too late to appear at the Quindone of St Michael to defend the appeal of Margaret, formerly wife of Richard de Burton, and that he was not to be put to damages in consequence. Dated from Berwick 15th October 9 Ed. III (1336).

Richard de Burton had been killed in a quarrel at Cresswell and Margaret was sueing Thomas, his brother Henry and others for damages.

These records indicate that Thomas de Cresswell was of good family or he would not have been able to obtain the King's favour to such a marked degree—for the pardon carried with it complete restitution of all his property which had been confiscated under his sentence of outlawry.

The proceedings before the justices also suggest that he was in France with Sir John de Ipstanes, a family with whom the Cresswells were connected by marriage. They had all imbibed some of the lawlessness so prevalent in the army at that period.

That he was in Scotland on several occasions is proved by the Rolls; and Letters of Protection were granted to him while with

the King's army in France. (The Hundred Years War began in 1338.) There is no inquisition on his death, but that he died before 1377 is certain and was succeeded by a son, Thomas, for it is proved by a Suit in that year on the Coram Rege Roll, 50 Ed. III which states that Thomas de Cresswell de Billerbrook was sued by Ralph de Ferrars Knt for a trespass in Tettenhall Regis of which the latter was Lord.

He may have been swept away during the Black Death, the terrible plague, due to filthy and insanitary conditions, that devastated the country for nearly two years in 1348–49 when Thomas de Cresswell would have been approaching old age.

It is believed to have destroyed almost half of the entire population, then about 4,000,000, and was a disaster of such magnitude that it changed the whole course and future pattern of life.

Feudal lords could no longer maintain their lands when compulsory labour failed because no labour had survived and this led increasingly to the payment of field services with cash. Serfs fled into neighbouring territories where they could earn money to buy their freedom and peasants began to keep sheep for the same purpose. Thus did the development of the wool trade begin, for English fleeces had long been famous in Europe.

Landlords leased out their lands, enclosures were made and gradually two new classes emerged, the yeoman farmer and the landless labourer, paid for his services.

The Midlands of England were a centre of the wool trade, particularly towards the west where there was plenty of water. Bilbrook and Barnhurst in the parish of Tettenhall lay well south of Stafford and only just north of Wolverhampton which was to develop into a large market town.

After the Black Death the descendants of Thomas de Cresswell took no part that is known in the Wars of the Roses. The doughty warrior had acquired an estate but not wealth and they turned their attention to making money, founding a family business in Wolverhampton, based on sheep and wool.

The next mention of them in the Plea Rolls comes in 4 Henry III (1381) figuring in a dispute about common or pasture land in Tettenhall and they are not mentioned again until the appearance of Thomas de Cresswell de Barnhurst, born 1468, died 1544.

They were in occupation of Barnhurst before they acquired the Lordship of its manor and as Sir Henry de Cresswell had left only a daughter, his brother's family carried on the Cresswell name and their shield of the three squirrels sejant.

They became pioneers of the wool and cloth trade and grew steadily in prosperity. Thomas de Cresswell de Barnhurst, born 1468, had a brother William Cresswell of Wolverhampton, a clothier.

By 1544 when that Thomas died they were also established as considerable land-owners round Tettenhall, in Bilbrook and in Wolverhampton and Thomas's son, the first Richard Cresswell of his line, is recorded as 'holding the Manor of Bovenhull (Barnhurst) and in addition was seized of Messuages and Lands in Kent, held of Queen Elizabeth in fealty and in particular of her Manor of East Greenwich by fealty, valued at 33s. 4d.'

This is not the only record of Cresswells in Kent for a Richard de Cresvil was Rector of Rolvenden in the time of Edward III.

Barnhurst had been anciently known and was often referred to as 'Bovenhull' said to mean 'above the hill'. At one time it had been the Tithe Barn of the Canons of Tettenhall. They had sold it to the Wrottesleys—Sir William de Wrottesley had been a co-juror with Sir Henry de Cresswell—from them it passed to the Levesons, ancestors of the Dukes of Sutherland and a great wool family who remained in the district well into the twentieth century. They sold Barnhurst to the Cresswells who were already tenants, soon after the accession of Queen Elizabeth (1558).

Barnhurst has now been engulfed by Wolverhampton although a fourteenth century gateway tower survived until recently and a very fine old columbarium or dovecot.

The great wool market in Wolverhampton has died out but traces of it remain in the names of the various 'folds', such as 'Townwell Fold', 'Wheelers' Fold', 'Farmers' Fold', etc.

In the old records Cresswell is variously spelt: de Cresswall, Cressewalle, Craswall, Kereswall, Kersewall, Creswell and of course, Crefswell. One writer stated that it came from 'Christ's Well' but since its origin was French it is more likely to have been Christville, hence Cressvil. Yet another gave 'Dweller by the Watercress Well'.

Richard Cresswell I, the first of his family to be Lord of the Manor of Barnhurst, was born in 1490.

A manor in those days was not merely a house, which was a messuage, but had a court holding judicial authority over its district and the owners became squires.

Richard Cresswell was also a Merchant of the Staple.

The Staple, where English goods for export were collected, taxed and sold, was necessary for levying the Customs duties on which the King's finances depended, and the Company of the Staple held a partial monopoly, not always agreeable to other wool growers and rival merchants. Originally they dealt only in wool, but gradually the export of cloth increased and by the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Cresswells were Merchants of the Staple, the wool exports were far exceeded by those of cloth.

The Staple was fixed in certain English towns, then in Flanders and finally in Calais. It would have been through their business interests that the Cresswells came to hold their messuages and lands in Kent.

G. M. Trevelyan in his *Social History* tells us that the growth of the cloth trade went on for generations, creating new classes in town and country, adding to the luxury of the manor and relieving poverty in the cottages. It was incomparably the most important English industry till the far distant day 'when coal was wedded to iron'. For centuries it occupied men's thoughts in town and village, second only to agriculture; and many phrases and metaphors in our literature and common speech are derived from the manufacture of cloth—'thread of discourse', 'spin a yarn', 'unravel a mystery', 'fine-drawn', 'homespun', 'tease', while all unmarried women were put down as spinsters.

Richard Cresswell died on 6th November 1560. His wife's name was Margaret and he had a brother William and several sisters.

His son and heir, the second Richard Cresswell of Barnhurst, was a minor when his father died, but shortly after attaining his majority he too became a Merchant of the Staple.

Richard Cresswell II married as his first wife on 29th October 1571 Joan Dyott, whose memorial was in Tettenhall Church, later destroyed by fire.

In the next century a descendant of her family was the famous 'Dumb Dyott' of Lichfield, the Royalist who in the Civil War shot the redoubtable Roundhead General, Lord Brook, as he sat at an open window after capturing the city in 1643.

The Dyott family are still in occupation of their Manor of Freefold, Lichfield, which they have held for more than 500 years.

A mural marble monument to Joan Cresswell of the Barnhurst was in the chancel under the great west window in Tettenhall Church.* It bore the effigy of a woman at her devotions with a book on a desk before her and underneath this inscription:

> Hereunder lieth the bodi of the virtuous and godly woman Joan Cresswell, late wife of Richard Cresswell of Barnhurst in this parish and county, Merchant of the Staple, and sometime daughter of John Diott of the Citie of Lichfield, Gentleman, which Joan left this mortal lyffe the XIX day of Oct 1590, having had betwixt them tenne children, fyffe sonnes and fyffe daughters. Three sonnes went before her, two the rest, remain here yet, God send them well to do. Amen.
>
> "Vivit post funera virtus".

The two sons who remained were Richard and Emanuel. One can feel certain that those who went before were Thomas, William and John, the names that recur so confusingly in every generation. The daughters all married.

In his will their father desired to be buried 'in our usual place of burial' near his first wife. Meantime he married again and had another son named William. His second wife born a Fowke, was the widow of Walter Grosvenor—a well-known family—for whom she had already produced many children so that this marriage considerably enlarged the family circle.

Richard Cresswell provided generously for her and for William in his will, naming her Anne, although other references give Joyce. It is of no importance after 350 years, but the connection with the Fowke family led in the next generation to his son and heir Richard Cresswell III marrying Margery, daughter and heiress of the head of the family, Fowke of Gunston, Staffs, Esq., who gave him five daughters and a son, Richard Cresswell IV.

* See illustration facing page 32.

Richard Cresswell II of Barnhurst died in 1612.

Richard Cresswell III of Barnhurst, born in 1578, died in 1626, describing himself in his will as Esquire, thus indicating that he had matriculated his arms.

There is a touch of amusing speculation about this, as to whether it was a gesture of defiance or a plain statement of fact. In 1614, soon after his father's death, the Heralds had made a visitation to Staffordshire and they had not recorded his arms and pedigree, although they had done so for the younger branch of the family, the Cresswells of Wolverhampton.

Richard stood to inherit the arms because his cousin, a contemporary of his father, had no son.

Perhaps he was absent on business and the matter went by default, or he may have been more interested in making money than in heraldry. His own son was as yet unborn but he had several daughters who would all need good dowries if they were to marry advantageously. The Heralds recorded him only indirectly.

Cresswell of Barnhurst married to the daughter of Fowke of Gunston was noted beside the pedigree of Cresswell of Wolverhampton; also in the Dyott pedigree his mother was shown as married to Cresswell of Barnhurst and his eldest sister Susannah was named who had married firstly John Elwes Esq. and then Sir John Curzon Kt; but on a list of worthy personages, against the name of Mr Cresswell of Barnhurst was written 'ignobile'. Clearly he had not paid their fees!

When he wrote his will in 1625, the year before he died, he had presumably outlived his cousin.

Two letters exist written by his grandfather, the first Richard, to 'Cosen John' of Wolverhampton, son of his uncle William. One is dated 4th August 1555 and the other 6th January 1558. Both deal with family business and are signed with the Cresswell heraldic seal of the three squirrels, showing these arms to have been in current use.

The arms recorded in 1614 were slightly different from those of the Sheriff of Staffordshire in 1166, as might be expected, for Thomas de Cresswell, brother of Sir Henry, had been only a younger son and a soldier of very small fortune.

The shield was now gules (red) not azure and the three plates

were each charged with the familiar red squirrel, now called 'proper', not gules. They sat with their tails curled up like plumes, three Squirrel Nutkins of the nursery tale, but no longer cracked golden nuts.

The Heralds of 1614 also recorded the family crest of a Moor's head and shoulders couped, with a red mullet (a five-pointed star) on his chest. This Saracen head has always been supposed to indicate that between 1166 and the brothers Henry and Thomas the Cresswell forbears took part in the Crusades. As a Norman family very probably they did, either under Richard, Cœur de Lion, or in 1240 under his nephew Richard, Earl of Cornwall, younger son of King John.

At the time of the Heralds' visitations in the seventeenth century there were Cresswells established in seven English counties, all of whom had pedigrees and were entitled to bear arms and all were linked by the device of the red squirrel.

Richard Cresswell prospered in his business affairs and it is interesting to note that in his will he directed his trustees to provide for his five daughters, Dorothy, Mary, Margery, Margaret and Elizabeth, from his 'East India Venture'. Also he directed that his son, young Richard Cresswell, born in 1620, should go to grammar school and the university.

The boy, only six when his father died, three years later was appointed page to King Charles I and lived to be a grand old man of eighty-eight. All the girls married.

The family had come a long way since the impecunious Norman knight and was now well established and apparently secure, for the desolation of the Civil War lay far ahead and round the corner. Henceforward Cresswell heirs would always be matched with heiresses.

Marriages in those days were serious bargains arranged on a basis of security for the future.

A cynical Frenchman once made out a table showing what manner of suitor might be expected for a daughter in accordance with her father's rank and wealth.

It ended on a sad note with the daughter of a country gentleman, no dowry and plain—a convent.

It was very beneficial for England when her clergy were permitted to marry.

CHAPTER TWO

Sidbury and Rudge

RICHARD CRESSWELL IV, nine years old when appointed page to King Charles I, became in due course an Ensign in the newly formed Honourable Artillery Company.

Loyal to the King throughout the Civil War, he was in attendance on him at Oxford and helped in his escape, being mentioned in the examination of Dr Hudson before the Mayor of Newcastle on 16th May 1646.

Dr Michael Hudson, one of the King's Chaplains, who had discarded his Bible and cassock for a sword and breastplate, met with a terrible death, loyal to the bitter end. He acted as liaison officer for the King between Oxford and the Scots' headquarters and in the escape from Oxford he and another Royalist, John Ashburnham, led the King disguised as a manservant over Magdalen bridge through country byways and lanes to safety, whilst feint escape parties distracted attention at other points.

After the surrender of Woodcroft Manor near Peterborough in the final stages of the war, as he tried to escape by climbing down the walls, both his hands were chopped off and the victorious Roundheads clubbed him to death like a rat in the moat below.

By tradition Richard Cresswell fought in the siege of Bridgnorth under Colonel Billingsley in April 1646.

Bridgnorth in Shropshire lies south of Shrewsbury and is not far from Tettenhall and Barnhurst on the Staffordshire border.

Realizing that only the castle could be held, the Royalist garrison demolished the town hall and all the buildings outside the city walls, which so infuriated the people that when the

Parliamentarians broke through and the Royalists were driven back to the castle they stoned them in retaliation.

The Roundheads attacked in three prongs and within three days breached the walls near St Leonard's Church where the main fighting took place in the churchyard and Colonel Billingsley fell. As the Royalists retired they burnt the town.

The castle withstood bombardment for three weeks before capitulating so the unfortunate townsfolk suffered severely from both sides. How often has history repeated this story! Armies winning glorious battles and the local people their unwilling and unfortunate sacrifice.

The damage was estimated at £90,000, a large sum in those days, and the town was the subject of an appeal to Parliament, but nothing very much was done and it remained more or less in a state of ruin throughout the whole Commonwealth period.

The Articles of Capitulation were considered to be very reasonable and were signed by four knights for the King, one of them, Sir Vincent Corbet, later to be connected with the Cresswells.

These four were allowed to depart with a horse and two servants apiece, but the common soldiers were marched away 'with only their hands in their pockets'.

Richard Cresswell was not in the beseiged castle for we know that he returned to Oxford and rejoined the King.

He was now twenty-six years old. He could have made his escape when Colonel Billingsley fell and probably carried the news.

After the Restoration the Colonel's sword was placed in a position of honour in St Leonard's Church and his nephew built ten almshouses which are maintained to this day. But the times still pressed hardly on everyone. The 1660s suffered the war with the Dutch, the Plague of London and the Great Fire, all of which caused loss of trade and many hardships.

One of the places sacked by the Parliamentarians was Sidbury Hall, south-west of Bridgnorth and about twenty miles from Barnhurst. It was an ancient moated property that for 200 years had belonged to the Purslows and on it was a mound called Lady Godiva's Castle, where traditionally Lady Godiva had once lived.

In January 1657 Richard Cresswell married Anne Lea, step-daughter of Hugh (some say George) Lea of the Lea, Hereford, who was the half-sister and devisee of Roland Purslow of Sidbury. She was the daughter of Richard Purslow whose father Sir Robert had been High Sheriff of Salop in 1609.

Presumably her mother was a second wife and when widowed married again.

Anne brought the Sidbury estate into the Cresswell family, whose descendants hold it still, though not in the male line.

Some old dark green bottles have been picked up from time to time out of the moat, stamped with the Cresswell arms of the three squirrels sejant on a shield, a reminder of the days when arms served many a useful purpose before the ordinary man could read.

The Rev. R. W. Eyton in his book on the antiquities of Shropshire stated that Sidbury was formerly Sudbury or Southborough and is in Domesday Book; and he also mentions 'William de Eyton whom the Feodaries of 1240 enter as holding one fee in Eyton and one fee in Kereswall [Cresswell] of the Barony of Wem'.

In the ledgers of Edward Blackwell, a goldsmith banker in London, there is a record of a small deposit account from 1666–68 of Richard Cresswell of Sudbury. (The Plague would have kept him from London in 1665.) Sudbury is also used on his grand-daughter's memorial in Lincoln Cathedral (1719).

After the Restoration Charles II, who would have known him personally, rewarded Richard Cresswell for his services to his father with the return of his estates; and on the Heralds' visitation to Shropshire in 1663 his arms were 'allowed' and recorded, thus officially confirming to his use the ancient symbol of the squirrels that his family had used for centuries.

Arms were allowed by the Heralds when it was apparent that they had been in use prior to the granting of arms and probably prior to 1415. In this case they were identical with those recorded with the crest by the Heralds on their visitation to Staffordshire in 1614, but this time included the pedigree of Cresswell of Barnhurst, so that honour was restored.

Although they used their arms thereafter for more than two centuries, the Cresswells did not again trouble to matriculate

at the College of Arms the quarterings they inherited through marriage with the heiresses of Sidbury, Pinkney and Bibury, in Shropshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire respectively.

Not until the twentieth century when the senior line died out (1923) and the family was dispersed did it become necessary for a younger branch to establish.

In the long interval their crest of a Moor or a Saracen's head had acquired a wreath vert et argent and is thus shown in old books of reference. It was only after checking the official record of 1614 that the new head of family regretfully jettisoned his wreath for that record stands even though it does not exactly tally with some of the family silver.

In 1670 Richard Cresswell was appointed High Sheriff of Salop, but as late as 1672 was apparently still living on a small property at Highley, perhaps while Sidbury Hall was being restored and because money was in short supply.

However by 1681 he was at Sidbury when he and his eldest son Purslow were made Burgesses or Freemen of Bridgnorth, which gave them votes in the coming election.

In the following year Purslow died and the heir was then his brother, the fifth Richard Cresswell, who never became a Burgess of Bridgnorth, presumably because he remained in Staffordshire, as about this time he married into a Staffordshire family.

In 1686 his father, having migrated to Shropshire, sold Barnhurst and bought Rudge on the border of the two counties and it is assumed that his son, on his marriage, lived there.

Rudge Hall is still occupied and is a dignified mansion that has had a good deal of alteration, but the ghost of a returning Cresswell would recognize the substantial stable block, carved with the date 1639.

A family legend related that Nell Gwynne left property at Tettenhall to Richard Cresswell IV in her will, but she died very much in debt in 1687 leaving everything apart from her charitable bequests to her son the Duke of St Albans, on whom her properties and valuable possessions were already entailed. She may, however, have been influential in getting the Cresswell estate in Tettenhall restored and could certainly have known him. At all events her portrait has been preserved in the family.

In 1666 when there is evidence of Richard Cresswell having

been in London, Nell Gwynne was about sixteen and had graduated from being an orange girl to become an actress at the King's Theatre. In the following year she was carried off by the 'jolly, loose-living, magnificent' Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, later the sixth Earl of Dorset, who set up house with her at Epsom and a merry life went on for all. He was then about twenty-six. But it did not last long; her witty vivacious spirit could not submit to being caged and by August she was back on the stage. The King first sent for her in January 1668 and she was definitely his mistress in 1669.

Judging by the bank account Richard Cresswell left London in 1668 and it would seem certain that he regained his estates before he became High Sheriff of Salop in 1670.

Strangely enough the present head of the family is married to a direct descendant of Nell Gwynne, through her son the Duke of St Albans.

There are so many soi-disant portraits of Nell Gwynne that a certain scepticism is aroused, but the Cresswell painting is very similar in form to youthful prints of her in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Only the hair style is different and even this is reminiscent of Huysman who painted Charles II's wife and did rather romantic portraits and religious pictures.

A discreet green curtain veiled this portrait where it hung on the wall in Victorian days.

Possibly the Cresswells acquired it later through their connection with the Sackvilles and it came from Bibury, but more probably it came from the Scropes, as it may have belonged to Sir Carr Scrope (Scroope) of Cockerington, Lincs. (1649–80) a courtier poet, Lord Rochester's 'ugly beau garcon', one of 'the Wits who wrote with ease', a companion of Charles II and a friend and admirer of Nell Gwynne. The sophistication of the pearls in her hair indicate that the child is her second son, born on Christmas Day 1671, and his age in the portrait fits with the days of her grandeur when she was regally established and the King and his friends visited her daily.

Around 1676 Sir Carr Scrope fell in love with a Miss Fraser at Court, but was so horrified by her expenditure on dress that he changed his mind and did not marry her and died a bachelor. The dress that particularly shocked him was said to have cost £300.

Richard Cresswell's grand-daughter married Gervase Scrope of Cockerington and her eldest son, another Gervase, was always short of cash and may well have sold the portrait to his Cresswell cousin.

The fourth Richard Cresswell and his wife Anne both lived to a great age. Anne died first in 1705 aged eighty-four, leaving the Sidbury estate to her son, Richard Cresswell V, so that two years later when old Richard wrote his last will and testament, he styled himself 'of Rudge'.

He began: 'In the name of God Amen. The first day of August 1707, I, Richard Cresswell of Rudge in the County of Salop, being weak in Body but of sound and perfect mind and memory, thanks be to God, do make my last Will . . .'

He goes on to appoint three 'loving friends' as trustees and is much concerned for the completion of the new almshouse with garden that he is building in Tettenhall for six poor persons who shall have been in his own or his grandson's service.

His 'loving friends' were 'Walter Moseley of Mere in the Parish of Enfield, Co. Stafford Esq.; John Cresswell of Gaines in the Parish of Whitburn in the Co. of Hereford, Gent.; and John Trannton of Oken in the Co. of Stafford aforesaid, Gent.'

One of his sisters had married Moseley of Mere.

He made his grandson Richard Cresswell VI his heir, but provided £2,000 of lawful English money to be laid out in the purchase of 'some good estate of inheritance' for his younger grandson Thomas. His son Richard V is only tenant for life of certain lands because he is already provided for by his mother, having inherited Sidbury on her death. All the same his son was not best pleased. Having spent over twenty years, since his marriage, at Rudge, as is supposed, he did not care to be passed over. Moreover it precluded him from taking part in politics, a costly business and his own son now took over this role. This may have been the old man's intention for his daughter-in-law came from a rich Whig family and he, of course, was an ardent Jacobite.

Old Richard's memorial and that of his wife are in Sidbury Church, inscribed in Latin and carved with the Cresswell and Purslow arms.

Monument to Joan Cresswell in Old Tettenhall Church, dated 1590, destroyed by fire.

Richard Cresswell: The Page Boy of 1629
Posed by his grandson of the same name, circa *1697.*

King Charles I's head is outlined in the white linen sleeve, wearing a dark cap.

Anne Purslow (Lea) Heiress of Sidbury, 1621–1705, m. 1657 Richard Cresswell of Barnhurst, later of Rudge, High Sheriff of Salop 1670.

Nell Gwynne 1650–87. 'Her smiles made summer and she always smiled.'

Probably painted 1673 during her most influential years. James her second son, who died young, was born Christmas Day 1671. The portrait is too sophisticated in hair style for the child to be her elder son, Charles, later Duke of St Albans, born May 1670 before she was established.

Richard Cresswell of Sidbury
1659-60–1723.
High Sheriff of Shropshire 1711.

Mary Moreton 1667-8–1748.
Sister of Matthew, 1st Lord Ducie
of Moreton, Staffs.
M. circa *1686, Richard Cresswell of*
Sidbury, High Sheriff of Salop 1711.
'She had very grand ideas.'

Translated they read:

In memory of Richard Cresswell Esq who in the Civil War was in vain faithful to Charles the best of Kings and though subdued and enslaved yet conferred innumerable benefits on his Country. The needy he sustained with perpetual supplies and with a liberal hand. He died Feb 19th 1708.

Go Traveller and imitate him.

Here are interred the remains of Ann the beloved wife of Richard Cresswell Esq who by her conspicuous piety and virtue adorned her sex and added the ancient estate of the Purslows to the present family. She left this mortal life the 31st January 1705.

The Age alas has not given her equal.

Richard Cresswell V seems to have been a less colourful character than his father or his son and possibly was overshadowed by his elder brother Purslow, who had died.

Shortly after he became heir he married into a wealthy Staffordshire family with London connections. His wife was Mary Moreton, daughter of Edward Moreton, Esq., of Moreton, Staffs, and Elizabeth, grand-daughter and eventual heiress of Sir Robert Ducie or Ducye of Little Aston, Staffs., and of London.

Sir Robert acquired immense wealth. He was a Sheriff of London, then an Alderman and was the Lord Mayor in 1631 and created a Baronet. Before the Civil War he was banker to Charles I and lost, it was said, over £80,000 through the war, but even so was reputed to have left over £400,000 at his death.

Three sons followed him in succession, then a grandson from his fourth son, then his fifth and last son, who left the daughter Elizabeth. She had an only son, Matthew Moreton created first Lord Ducie in 1720, and the daughter Mary who married Richard Cresswell and had very grand ideas.

It is always shocking to look back on the rate of mortality in olden days and Mary Cresswell, in the course of a long life, suffered many bereavements and lived through troubled times.

We know of only three children—Richard, his grandfather's heir, Thomas, mentioned in the will but not again, and Elizabeth.

All the usual names.

Richard was born in a momentous year in English history,

1688, so was twenty when he inherited Rudge from his grandfather and on 16th June 1710, the opening day of the Bridgnorth election campaign, he was made a Burgess of the town and was the leading Tory candidate and the moving spirit of the election.

Political feeling ran high throughout Queen Anne's reign, especially towards its end, when the whole country was heartily tired of the Whig Government and its restrictive practices and of the incessant war abroad.

The Cresswells were known as staunch Jacobites and young Richard, with a neighbour Whitmore Acton, was duly elected M.P. in the Tory Parliament of 1710–13.

In the following year his father Richard V was named High Sheriff of Salop, perhaps on account of the family record.

A pamphlet of this period entitled 'The Old Wives' Tales' was dedicated to Richard Cresswell son of the Sheriff and ran:

> Would everyman like Richard Cresswell have laid to heart the good of his country, we should not have seen the dismal effects of one man's Avarice and known a long and expensive war; nor would our children to a third and fourth generation have been taxed to aggrandise one family.

The text shows the reference was to Marlborough, who was held responsible for the hated overseas campaigns.

In 1709 a celebrated churchman, Dr Henry Sacheverell, had delivered two sermons railing against the Low Church attitude of the Government and for this act had been impeached and suspended from preaching for three years. He became a popular hero and on the termination of his trial made a triumphal progress through the country.

The Press reported:

> During the ebullition of party rage, when Dr Sacheverell made what partisans called his triumphant progress to Shropshire, Mr Cresswell is mentioned as one of the Doctor's warmest supporters and in a pamphlet of the day occurs the following:
>
> The bells began to call the rabble together and the Gentry assembled in the Market Place and went out of the Town in this order to meet him.

Then follows an account somewhat caricatured of the procession :

> John Kynaston Esq of Hordley Hardwicke; Alrightly or his son Corbet Kynaston; Roger Owen Esq of Condover and the Council House; Edward Cresset Esq of Cound; Richard Cresswell Esq of Sidbury; and Robert Myddleton Esq of Shrewsbury, eventually heir of Chirk.

Then is added a letter from Mr Cresswell, signed R. C. Junior (his father was then living), informing his friends, 'Dr Sacheverell comes from Condover Wed, 5th July and doth me the honour to dine that day at the Cock and Castle, Bridgnorth. I beg the favour of all Clergymen and others that are well-wishers to him or his doctrine to accompany him into town about 12 o'clock.'

This episode is also described in William Harrison Ainsworth's historical romance *St James or the Court of Queen Anne* :

> . . . the greatest honour shown him was at Bridgnorth. As he approached the town he was met by Mr Cresswell, a wealthy gentleman of the neighbourhood, attached to the Jacobite Cause, at the head of an immense cavalcade of horse and foot, amounting to many thousands, most of whom wore white breast-knots edged with gold and gilt laurel leaves in their hats. The roads were lined with people and to add to the effect of the procession, the hedges were dressed with flowers to the distance of two miles. The steeples were adorned with flags and flowers and the bells rang out merrily.

The good doctor's activities paved the way for the fall of the Whig Government and in 1713, after the expiration of the three years veto, he was allowed to preach to the House of Commons at St Margaret's, Westminster, and was given the rich living of St Andrew's, Holborn.

CHAPTER THREE

Pinkney Park, the haunted house

MEANTIME THE debonair young Richard Cresswell VI had been courting and had married Elizabeth Estcourt, related to his Shropshire neighbours, the Corbets, and the heiress of the Sherston Pinkney estate near Malmesbury in Wiltshire.

Consequently in 1713 he did not again contest Bridgnorth but settled for the safe seat of St John's, Wootton Bassett, which he was able to win through the Estcourt interest and to represent until 1715, when the Government fell and the Whigs were again returned to power.

The family have a dashing portrait of him in armour and another in a glowing red velvet coat and it is thought that as a child he posed for his grandfather as the page boy of 1629. Experts date this portrait late seventeenth century and he was nine years old in 1697.

It is an intriguing picture,* for why should he have done so, though his mother came of a wealthy family and portrait painting was much in vogue.

Hidden in the voluminous folds of the boy's right shirt sleeve is painted the suggestion of a man's face with a pointed beard, his eyes closed in death; a dark line severes the head from the collar or cloth, under which there is lace that also forms the boys' wristlet where his hand goes into his pocket. On the forehead lie a few strands of hair, but at the back of it is bundled into a dark cap, formed from the inside of the tunic sleeve.

> Then the King called to Dr Juxton for his nightcap, and having put it on, he said to the executioner 'Does my hair trouble you? who desired him to put it all under his cap, which the King did.
>
> (John Rushworth).

* See illustration between pages 32-33.

There can be little doubt that the portrait of the page was painted in memory of his royal master.

It must be remembered that Charles I was a gentle character who inspired love, that his finest hour came when he delivered his great speech at his trial and he died with a dignity that touched all men's hearts.

In 1697 William of Orange and Mary were on the throne and no one could love William. James II was living in exile, but his cause was not yet lost, and his son, the future James III or Old Pretender, was the same age as young Richard Cresswell.

The leading Jacobites, meeting on the day of Queen Anne's death in 1714, lost their chance through indecision. Could James III have come forward then, to reassure the country on the subject of religion, while the Tory Government was still in power, he might have won his kingdom. But a majority in the country was against a Roman Catholic sovereign and once the Hanoverian George I was on the throne, he was generally accepted.

Parliament was dissolved on 5th January 1715 and met again in March 1715 with a large Whig majority, a swift revulsion of feeling from the Tory enthusiasm of only four years earlier, but in 1710 the country had been weary of the almost continuous state of war across the Channel and in 1715 dreaded that a Tory ascendancy might lead to another civil war.

The four leading Tory Ministers were impeached, but the Duke of Ormonde remained in England until August, to prepare the ground for revolt, especially in the predominantly Tory and Jacobite counties of the west of England.

The Jacobite plans were not skilfully concealed and the Government was aware of what was going on and decided wisely to strike where the danger was greatest which was in London and the west.

The first arrest took place on 2nd September, that of Lt.-Colonel Paul of the 1st Guards, and Sir Charles Petrie notes it as significant that Marlborough—who always played safe politically and was Colonel of that Regiment—contributed £4,000 in all to the Jacobite funds between April and August 1715.

On 21st September the House of Commons consented to the arrest of six of its Members. Among them was Corbet Kynaston, M.P. for Shrewsbury, friend and ally of Richard Cresswell in the Bridgnorth election campaign. He fled overseas. Perhaps it was as well Richard Cresswell was no longer in the House.

The Government struck only just in time for the Jacobites were mustering in Bath, where there was a great demonstration of loyalty for James III and much ringing of church bells.

Although there is no direct evidence, Richard Cresswell, well known as a Jacobite, would undoubtedly have been involved. Pinkney was within easy riding distance of Bath, also his name was noticeably absent from among those of the Deputy Lieutenants of the County, appointed to keep order.

Major-General Wade (of Highland fame in connection with his roads and bridges) occupied Bath with Windsor's Regiment of Horse and Rich's Dragoons and the arsenal that had been established there was seized, with about 200 horses which were to have mounted the Jacobite cavalry.

There were many arrests, but the news of what was happening in London brought about a rapid dispersal of Jacobite supporters.

In London the arrests continued all through September and into October and Sir Charles Petrie states categorically that the rising in the west of England was intended to be the main one, with those in Scotland and Lancashire subsidiary, and that the evidence leaves little doubt that failure was due and the cause ruined through the incompetent leadership of the Duke of Ormonde.

Richard Cresswell may have used Sidbury, his father's house, as a retreat but the Government showed leniency to the Jacobites in the south and west of England, compared to Scotland, because it wanted the country to settle down. Consequently trouble that brewed between 1716 and 1722, although alarming, was insignificant and the next twenty years showed a marked decline in popularity and a degradation of the movement in England. Those who supported it were no longer of the same calibre and the exiled dynasty became little more than a memory.

The political *fait accompli* was accepted by the ordinary

Englishman because the country was gradually growing very prosperous. It needed rest and stability and was tired of wars and alarms. 'Queen Anne was dead' and her epoch had ended; only sentimental attachments remained. It was noted in 1734 that in Winchester School the boys were fifty-fifty Georgites and Jacobites.

In 1745 Prince Charles Edward had no contact with English Jacobites during his preparations and unlike the '15, it was an improvised affair.

Pinkney, acquired by Richard Cresswell in right of his wife, was also known as Sherston Pinkney or Sherston Parva, its village being Sherston Magna with a tradition of having once been a flourishing market town. Elizabeth Estcourt had also inherited the Lordships of the three Manors of Sherston, Pinkney and Norton.

John Aubrey, writing in the seventeenth century, said the town of Sherston was burnt in the time of Henry VIII. This would have been on the dissolution of the monasteries when its ecclesiastical affairs were under the Abbot of Tewkesbury.

He also wrote: 'Sherston lies on the north limits of the Shire from whence it hath its denomination: perhaps anciently a mere or shire stone might be set up. Saxon "scire" signifies division, from whence a pair of shears.'

The Romans were there before the Saxons and Aubrey felt sure it was they who imported elm trees into Britain. Also Roman coins were frequently dug up around Sherston and in 1650, 'a prettie quantity was turned up in a field by ploughing'.

He himself had a silver piece of Constantine the Great, 'on his head is a kind of chaplet of roses, not laurell, his hair is a kind of flaggish hair; On the reverse Constantinus Aug . . .'

Canon Jackson who edited Aubrey's book in 1882, noted that the Manor of Great Sherston or Much Sherston, i.e. Sherston Magna, was granted by Henry III to Mathew Besil and passed to John Besil. In 1316 Edward I settled it on his daughter the Princess Mary, a nun of Amesbury, as part of her maintenance. In 1349 it belonged to Hugh le Despencer and through his

family went to the Beauchamps and in 1471 belonged to Richard Nevil, Earl of Warwick, the 'King-Maker'.

In 1585 the Earl of Hertford was Lord of the Manor and among the names of freeholders occur Thomas Estcourt, Esq., and Thomas Gore. A neighbour of Pinkney, Mr Gore, comes into the Pamphlets of 1747, nearly 200 years later. They were a well-known Wiltshire family. The Estcourts in due course became Lords of the Manor.

Pinkney in John Aubrey's day was only a small manor and parish. Ralph de Pinckney, who bequeathed his name, held a fee under the Barony of Castle Combe in the reign of Henry III, but from 1279 to *circa* 1560 it belonged to the Giffard and Esturmy families until it became the property of the Estcourts, who restored its manor house in 1636.

Some of the land at Sherston Pinkney belonged to the Abbey, but it once had a free chapel of its own, dedicated to St John the Baptist and existing in Mary Tudor's reign.

The building got destroyed and the site forgotten. This is perhaps significant as it provides a possible clue to the origin of the Pinkney Skull.

The destruction of the chapel sounds suspiciously like a Protestant reprisal, but it would have been tactless of Aubrey to say so, writing some dozen years later in the reign of good Queen Bess.

The Manor of Norton also belonged to Malmesbury Abbey until the Reformation.

Sherston Church has an ancient relic which Aubrey described and drew, a crude little image still to be seen above and to the right of the porch, about two and a half feet high, called the Rattlebone. It looks more like a priest than a soldier but Rattlebone is said to have fought against the Danes.

Possibly it represented Edmund Ironside and commemorated the battle fought at 'Sceorstan' against Canute in 1016. The legend was of a great battle and of a hero who fought on with a stone pressed to his wounded side and in the course of time a rhyme was attached that Aubrey quoted.

> Fight well Rattlebone
> Thou shalt have Sherstone.
> What will I with Sherstone doe

Without I have all belongs thereto?
Thou shalt have Wych and Willesly
Eastontowne and Pinkeney.

Eastontowne is a pretty hamlet between the two Sherstons. Canon Jackson in 1882 wrote, 'The men of Sherston still uphold with undiminished tenacity the local traditions of the formidable Rattlebone'.

A generation later the legend had been modernized and attached to a Cromwellian soldier. Volume 1 of Nulvert's Travels dated 19th August 1890 had the following:

> I walked to see John Bryant aged ninety. He told me there is at Sherston an Inn with the sign of a Rattlebone.
>
> Rattlebone was one of Cromwell's men and in a battle he was wounded and all his intestines came out. He found a tile and held it in front of the wound and went on fighting. Oliver Cromwell cried out 'Fight on and I will give you Sherston and Pinkney'.

This modernizing of an old legend has a bearing on the mansion house of Pinkney which contained the relic of a skull and had also gathered traditions.

They were founded as in many other cases, on a legendary wrong, done by one member of a family to another to get possession of property.

In this case one sister was said to have killed the other, whose ghost and skull, as a nemesis, ever after haunted the house.

At Pinkney Park the skull had its special niche under the window above the front stairs, and the ghost carried her head under her arm. On a door was the imprint of a woman's hand, and on the floor were blood stains that could not be removed.

There was also a secret room and a secret passage to the house with its entrance or exit hidden under the bridge that crossed the little river in the park, used no doubt during the Tudor religious persecutions, the Civil War, and the Jacobite plotting of 1715–22, and known to be still in existence within living memory.

Just as the Rattlebone became the focus of gradually changing legend, so did the Pinkney Skull, its most astonishing feature being its survival because no one has been able to get it buried. This aspect of the story is told in a long doggerel poem included in a collection made by Adin Williams and published in 1876.

Legends, Tales and Songs in Dialect of the Peasantry of Gloucestershire with several Ballads and a Glossary of Words in general use. Cirencester. C. H. Savory. Price 1s. St John St.

There is a Skull at Pinkney Hall
And it is old and dark.
It stands beneath the window wall
That overlooks the park.

How long 't has stood beneath its shade
No living man can say:
For ages efforts have been made
To put the bone away.

It hath been pounded bit by bit
And scattered on the green,
But e'er the Morn her lamp hath lit
It hath again been seen.

It hath been plunged into the sea
A thousand fathoms deep
And filled with lead that it might be
Where monsters play and sleep.

But soon the Lord of Pinkney Hall
With horror he discerned,
As he stood by the window-wall,
The skull it had returned.

The sexton delved at mid-night hour
And buried it in clay
Full twenty feet beneath the tower
But there it would not stay.

The Lord of Pinkney laughed and said
'No more shalt thou appal'
But when he left his sleepless bed
He found it neath the wall.

Lord Pinkney cried 'Oh Misery'
And cursed it with a frown,
'I've plunged thee in the briny sea
Full fifty fathoms down.'

'Oh I was glad to see thee sink
Beneath the ocean's wave

And I sailed home rejoiced to think
Of thine eternal grave.'

'And I sailed home with mirth and glee
To think that grisly bone,
Was safe beneath the deep blue sea
Beneath the torrid zone.'

'And Pinkney's doors were opened wide
I heard the trumpets sound;
And villagers with honest pride,
With flowers strewed the ground.'

'I heard the minstrels in the hall,
No living soul was dull;
When lo! beneath the window wall
I found the dismal skull.'

'With sand and shell 'twas covered o'er
And seaweeds dripping wet
Like some fresh waif cast on the shore
When first my gaze it met.'

'Thou shalt not be for ages more
To tax us with our guilt
To mind us of the human gore
Our wicked house has spilt.'

Lord Pinkney swore, Lord Pinkney cursed
He'd burn it like a brand
And in a fit of frenzy bore
The skull bone in his hand.

He placed it 'neath the wagon's tyre
And crushed it with a crash
And put the fragments in the fire
And burnt them to an ash.

Lord Pinkney quaffed the red wine cup
And gave a hearty laugh
To see the white ash whirling up
And scattered like the chaff.

Lord Pinkney kissed his pretty bride
For he was overjoyed
'This cursed skull' Lord Pinkney cried
'Forever is destroyed.'

Lord Pinkney rose the morrow's morn
To shed a bitter tear,
For e'er he blew his hunting horn
The object of his fear.

The horrid skull of Pinkney Hall
Which in the fire had burned,
He saw beneath the window wall
With freshness had returned.

Lord Pinkney made a shocking vow
And cursed that horrid bone,
When o'er the lawn like bended bow
There crossed an aged crone.

The old dame trembled in the cold
With few rags to defend her,
She was as frightful to behold
As King Saul's Witch of Endor.

'Forbear my Lord' the dame did say
'While Pinkney owns an ell
Of this domain, this skull will stay
Its vengeful tale to tell.'

'For ages heirs who came and went.
The old man and the boy,
Have many fruitless efforts spent
This skull bone to destroy.'

'Be calm my Lord and yield to Fate
Nor war with its decrees,
That skull was here on this estate
Before your old oak trees.

'When all the Pinkney race are dead
And strangers hold in trust
Thy lands—Oh then the skull you dread
Shall crumble into dust.'

Lord Pinkney jumped upon his steed,
Which pawed the verdant ground,
O'er hedge and ditch he tried his speed
To catch the baying hound.

And as he chased the bounding stag
Adown the winding vale,

He thought upon the shrivelled hag
And all her dismal tale.

And as he galloped with his men,
His fury did abate,
He vowed he never would again
Attempt to war with fate.

And to this day this skull is found
Beneath the crumbling wall,
And if you ask the people round
You will believe it all.

The age of the skull is unknown. It is very small and looks very old and is said to be female.

It may date from the time of Ralph de Pinckney—there are many older relics that have been preserved. Or perhaps it survives from a quarrel between the Giffards and the Esturmys who won the Manor after a lawsuit about 1407. Or it could be a relic from the vanished Pinkney Chapel, likely to have been adjacent to the old Manor house which may well have suffered with its chapel and had a 'crumbling wall'.

Nobody knows, but the ballad made the point and the belief was firmly established that the skull reposed in its appointed place because by some mysterious agency when it was removed it always returned, and gradually the story came to be fastened on to the time when Pinkney passed from the Estcourt into the Cresswell family.

Probing back into the Estcourt ownership of Pinkney the first mention of it comes in the preceding century.

The Estcourts had been established as land-owners in Gloucestershire since 1303 when Walter de la Estcourt in the time of Edward I held a knight's fee of Shipton.

Six generations of 'de la'Estcourt followed him, then came plain Edmund Estcourt whose wife bore the unusual name of Praxeda Bytton. Their eldest son Thomas, presumably the Thomas Estcourt Esq. recorded as a free-holder in Sherston, Wilts., under the Earl of Hertford 1585–88, ordered an impressive tomb for himself in the Parish Church of Shipton

Moyne, by will proved 1599. Their third son Richard also purchased land in Sherston and about 1589 bought part of Norton and the Lordship of the Manor from Lord Chandos, to whose ancestor it had been granted by Henry VIII after its seizure from the Abbey of Malmesbury.

Richard Estcourt's son Edmund Estcourt of Pinkney—Reader of Lincoln's Inn 1616; died 1651—married Jane co-heir of her father, Recorder of Bristol and M.P. for that City; a Baron of the Exchequer in 1604; a judge in Wales in 1608; without doubt a rich and distinguished man, with the odd name of Sir George Snigge. His wife was Alice, daughter of William Young of Ogbourne, Wilts. and he died 11th November 1617.

Co-heir indicates a sister as well as money wherewith to rebuild the old Manor house of Pinkney and that the Estcourts did so is proved by a stone carved 1636. So here there may have been a pair of sisters to fit the legend, but it is quite unfair to pin a murder on them, and it is much more likely that the skull was a relic from the old chapel destroyed after Mary Tudor's death and that its site was disturbed by later building.

Edmund and Jane's eldest son and his son were both distinguished men, each in turn becoming Sir Thomas Estcourt and Masters in Chancery. The first in 1652 and his son in 1680.

Aubrey in 1670 mentioned the old small Manor of Pinkney, which proves that the next rebuilding and enlargement was done by the second Sir Thomas Estcourt (1645–1702) who was M.P. for Malmesbury 1673–78 and M.P. for Bath 1695–98.

He married Mary Corbet, daughter of Sir Vincent Corbet Bt, who had featured in the siege of Bridgnorth and whose Castle of Moreton Corbet was burnt during the Civil War, but survived the centuries as a beautiful ruin. (One of his ancestors, Sir Robert Corbet, had been High Sheriff of Salop in 1507 and married a most remarkable lady, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Harry Vernon of Haddon, Co. Derby. She died in 1563 having survived her husband by fifty years and lived to see '233 descendants of her own body', leaving behind her the character 'of an amiable and virtuous lady'.)

The Corbets were of royal Plantagenet descent from Joan of Acre, daughter of Edward I the invincible king, builder of

mighty castles, and his first wife Eleanor of Castile; and the arms of Corbet were impaled with those of Estcourt above the doorway of Pinkney Park. Their children were Thomas (1680–1704), William, presumed to have died young because he was not mentioned in his father's nor his brother's will, Mary, and Elizabeth who married Richard Cresswell VI.

Thereafter Pinkney became the principal seat of the Cresswell family and a new chapter opened in their history.

The second Sir Thomas Estcourt died in 1702. Mary his elder daughter had displeased him in some way and in his will he left only £400 to 'my ungodly daughter Mary' whereas to his younger daughter Elizabeth he left everything not settled on his delicate son, hoping presumably to ensure a good marriage.

She was only fourteen when he died, the same age as Richard Cresswell subsequently her husband, both having been born in 1688.

Thomas the brother died two years later leaving his estate to Elizabeth and to her heirs for ever 'the Manor of Sherston, the Manor of Norton and the Manor of Pinkney, together with all and every their respective rights' and he expressed the earnest desire that henceforth 'she should do all that lies in her power that her children may bear the name of Estcourt, that the estate may continue in the name'.

But he also left £1,000 to his sister Mary 'Wife of Mr Cornelius Carter'. Mr, not Gent nor Esq., as was usual and might have been expected for the husband of an elder daughter, and provides a possible reason for the father's displeasure.

Mary married secondly William Poole, son or brother of Sir James Poole of Poole, Cheshire, but a Wiltshire family. Her nephew Thomas Estcourt Cresswell mentions riding over from Pinkney to visit his cousin Carter in 1741, which proves that she had a son, was certainly not murdered and lived within easy reach of Pinkney.

Charitable bequests and other smaller legacies in Thomas Estcourt's will were to be raised from the Manor of Norton, which must thereby have been diminished and there was a move in 1706–7 to sell it to Lord Weymouth as an estate of £500 per annum. Eventually it was sold to the Gould family from Middlesex in 1713. This was the year in which Richard Cress-

well became M.P. for Wootton Bassett in the new Tory Government.

He and Elizabeth Estcourt were married in 1709 or early in 1710, after he had inherited Rudge from his grandfather.

They had two sons. The elder born 24th October 1710 was Richard Estcourt Cresswell and the younger, born 12th July 1712, Thomas Estcourt Cresswell.

Their father at some time acquired the nickname of Black Dick, but it is not known when or why. Traditionally he went out to India and returned with some Indian servants and in the following century some upper rooms at Pinkney were called the Black Attics and were said to be haunted. They may have been the quarters of these shadowy pathetic exiles who were buried, not at Pinkney but at Sidbury.

Elizabeth Estcourt died before she was thirty, in 1717. No more is known than that, yet there is nearly always a kernel of truth in a legend and there was a long established tradition that Mary had pushed Elizabeth over the banisters in a jealous quarrel over Richard—or vice versa.

Supposing that the fascinating Richard indulged in a flirtation with Mary, the sisters quarrelled and a fall resulted in a miscarriage that proved fatal, a calamity all too frequent in those days.

Supposing that Elizabeth started the quarrel and her remorseful spirit, separated so tragically and irrevocably from all she held dear, could not be reconciled and haunted her home. It would accord with legend and ghost but not with the skull. It is inconceivable that her husband would have had her decapitated before burial and there can have been no physical connection. But that there was no mystic connection is less sure. Adversity shadowed the heirs of Pinkney and her early death suggests she herself may have fallen victim to a sinister influence.

There is a final story which can be made plausible of in truth two sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, were involved in a tragedy that was hushed up. It is that the skull belonged to an Elizabeth Corbet; and it fits with the aggrandisement of Pinkney at the end of the seventeenth century.

The second Sir Thomas Estcourt married Mary Corbet in 1677 at Lincoln's Inn Chapel, when her family was living in

Black Dick Cresswell, the Jacobite. 1688–1743.
M.P. Bridgnorth, Salop 1710–13.
M.P. Wootton Bassett, Wilts. 1713–15.
M. 1709–10 Elizabeth Estcourt of Pinkney.

Elizabeth Estcourt heiress of Pinkney 1688–1717.
M. 1709–10, Richard Cresswell of Rudge (Black Dick).

Betty Scrope, 1716–51.

. . . a sweetness of expression, a kissable look . . .

Pinkney Park: the haunted house. 'I went down to a little River in the Park.'

Queen Street, Covent Garden. She was one of Sir Vincent Corbet's three surviving daughters and had an older sister Elizabeth, who married Sir Robert Bolles of Scampton, Lincs. but can be eliminated because she died before the third Sir Vincent Corbet Bt, her father's grandson. Mary Corbet's other, younger, sister, Rachel, lived and died unmarried in Shrewsbury.

There was plenty of heart-burning in the family. Sir Vincent Corbet 1st Baronet had died in 1656 and in those grim years after the Civil War there were money troubles.

Elizabeth's portion from her father had been double that of her sisters (£2,000 against £1,000) and in 1659 his widow Sarah —an heiress, created Viscountess Corbet for life, after the Restoration—took action in Chancery against one of her late husband's trustees, his brother-in-law, Francis Thornes, alleging that he was alienating her son's affection from herself and her family and misappropriating her own and her daughters' trust funds.

The other two trustees resigned in sympathy but Francis Thornes countered by marrying his daughter Elizabeth to her son, the second Sir Vincent Corbet Bt. So here was an Elizabeth, sister-in-law as well as first cousin of Mary Estcourt, who had no cause to love her.

The second Sir Vincent died of small-pox in London in 1680, leaving a ten-year-old son the third Sir Vincent who died unmarried in 1688, the last of his line. The baronetcy lapsed and the Corbet estates passed to the next male Corbet heir, but thereafter Mary Estcourt considered herself her father's heraldic heiress, which meant that her son would be allowed to quarter the Estcourt arms with those of her Corbet father, and moreover her Corbet nephew's death would have released most of her mother's considerable fortune. It is noticeable in their wills that her son appeared to be more wealthy than his father. But Elizabeth, Lady Corbet, mother of Mary's late nephew was still living. Against the background of the former feud over trust funds, the two ladies may now have quarrelled again over money and status.

Mary's star was very much in the ascendant but Elizabeth's was low on the horizon. History has not recorded her beyond 1688. It is only known that she survived father, husband and son, and that her only relation nearer than Mary Estcourt was

a young married daughter—mother, incidentally, of the future Jacobite M.P., Corbet Kynaston. There was no one to make trouble if she died in tragic circumstances and Sir Thomas Estcourt, Master in Chancery, was in a position to hush up such a misfortune.

Her head could have been removed surreptitiously, perhaps as a safeguard against blackmail because it showed signs of sudden death—a broken neck?—to prevent identification of the body. The affair might even have happened in London and only the head been taken down to Pinkney for the secret burial it refused to accept. The story becomes as fictitious as any other and after more than 250 years those interested can but weigh the facts and possibilities and make their own choice.

Whoever she was in life, a simple reason for her ghost to haunt Pinkney would be the presence of her skull, separated from its corpse in an age that believed implicitly in the physical resurrection of the body—that the graves would open and the dead arise on the day of judgment. A successful attempt to bury or get rid of it would eliminate any possibility of identification.

Something happened in lovely Pinkney that left an enduring mark on time for the web of fortune spun from its gossamer held no blessing that can be discerned over the next two centuries. Both Mary's sons were to die young, as did her heiress daughter and Pinkney passed to the Cresswells.

Richard Cresswell had drunk the strong wine of adventurous living and could not settle for bread and milk and cabbages. He absorbed money and although he inherited great possessions was consistently short of cash.

The Bridgnorth election had proved costly and soon after his marriage he sold Rudge to pay his debts and perhaps his subscriptions to Jacobite funds. Probably the expenses of the Wootton Bassett election were met from the sale of Norton, but luckily there was a trustee in charge of the Pinkney estate.

The financial cost of being a Jacobite and on the losing side would have been considerable. He was under thirty when his wife died and his mother's family were City men. It is more than likely that he tried to recoup his fortunes in the orgy of speculation that culminated in the South Sea Bubble. His years in Parliament would have made him many friends and acquaint-

ances who would all have been mixed up in it and it is hard to suppose that he resisted the gamble.

The Bubble burst in 1720. In 1722 there was another Jacobite flare-up and in December 1723 his father died, leaving a brief will.

> Richard Cresswell of Sidbury Esq.
>
> On Wednesday 4th and Thursday 5th day of December 1723, being sick of the sickness whereof he died, on the said Thursday at his house at Sidbury, made his will . . . (nun) cupative as follows:
>
> 'To my son Richard all that I have in the world, both present and in reversion and notwithstanding my father disinherited me, I will not disinherit my son.'

On 6th February commission was issued to 'Richard Cresswell Esq. only lawful child and universal legatee named in the will, Mary Cresswell, relict of the deceased first consenting'.

Mrs Cresswell had money of her own and the Sidbury estate was her jointure. Perhaps she made her son a payment because it was believed that he went out to India, and having put his two sons into boarding school (neglecting thereafter to pay their bill) this is when he was thought to have gone, returning 1729–30.

If so he went as a 'free merchant' in association with the East India Company through the Moretons, his mother's family. It was a very closed circle and at that time highly profitable and as Mrs Cresswell held some shares, her family had a connection.

The East India Company after falling on evil days had been revived by Cromwell and during the first half of the eighteenth century, being connected only with trade, prospered exceedingly. However Richard Cresswell had married a second wife Roberta, a widow who presumably ran his house and looked after his boys and there is no actual proof that he ever went to India, whereas his younger son Thomas in June 1729, aged seventeen, went out 'to China in the India Trade' and his name and activities are recorded in the India Office in the annals of the East India Company and he could have brought back the Indian servants.

In 1627 bills were settled in Bridgnorth because Richard Cresswell was going to France for reasons of health. France, full of Jacobite friends and exiles, not to mention his contemporary, the Old Pretender and his family connection with the Stuart Court, was a more likely destination than distant India and

probably he went no further, for in 1729 Mr Longford, trustee of the Pinkney estate, died and Richard Cresswell applied for and was granted the administration of the estate on 3rd July 1730 so would have been back in England by that date.

His son Thomas' voyage round the Cape to India would have taken many months and soon after his departure his elder brother died (1730). Was there a shadow of misfortune over-hanging the Pinkney heirs? It almost seems so.

Richard Cresswell forthwith mortgaged Pinkney for £10,000 to Sir Abraham Lincoln, a rich Bristol magnate, Master of the Merchant Venturers Company, who had been created a baronet in 1717. He and his son of the same name were in succession Mayors and M.P.s for Bristol and he had been High Sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1716. He established his family at Clevedon Court near Bristol in 1709, where they live to this day, although recently it has been taken over by the National Trust. The Pinkney house appears to have been neglected. Was it haunted? There were no Cresswells to live in it in 1730. Black Dick, aged forty-two and perhaps in poor health, had never been a country squire in the sense of loving or managing land and presently left the care of his affairs to Thomas, who returned from the east in 1732 and made his home with his grandmother at Sidbury.

Black Dick always seems to have done himself well and is likely to have spent his latter years in leisured ease on his £10,000, drinking and gambling in the fashion of the day.

His son was thought to be 'in the shadow of a Fortune' which did not materialize and he planned 'to agree' with his father over Sidbury 'lest he should fell the Timber, which I am sure he would do for the value of a sixpence'. His father's death made little difference to him financially as he was engaged in his own business concerns. As the younger son he had not been brought up as the heir but knew he must make his own way in the world and it was through his diligence and wise management that the family estates were saved.

His father died during the winter of 1743 and Thomas wore mourning for him. Most likely he was living in Bath, frequented by all the family and within easy reach of Pinkney.

Bath was very fashionable. Society thronged to drink its waters

and to amuse itself, bringing with it an immense satellite population of attendants.

Beau Nash was there in 1739 and Sara Siddons, playing to crowded houses; while John Wesley made it the centre for many years of his preaching and missionary work, though not with much success in his early days.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Love Affair

BLACK DICK had an only sister, Elizabeth, four years younger than himself, who had married a good, kind man, Gervase Scrope (Scroope), Squire of Cockerington near Louth in Lincolnshire, High Sheriff of Lincoln in 1721.

She bore him four sons and four daughters, before dying when only twenty-seven years old, her reward being a marble memorial in Lincoln Cathedral.

Her mother came to stay for the birth of her eldest son and was a frequent visitor thereafter. History has not related who looked after her own husband but it may have been her son and his second wife. Mrs Cresswell was devoted to her Cresswell grandsons but when her only daughter died in 1719, barely two years after her daughter-in-law, she found herself, not yet fifty, with a tribe of motherless grandchildren. Of the Scrope family six grew up to be known to posterity. The four boys, Gervase the eldest, Tom who studied law, Carr who went to sea, and Fred. And two girls, the elder married to Lord Deloraine and last but by no means least, Elizabeth, known as Betty, the central figure in a future scandal.

Mrs Cresswell took charge of them all and ran the house for a year after her daughter's death until Gervase Scrope married again, choosing very suitably as his second wife a Miss Moreton, probably her niece. She then transferred to her brother Lord Ducie's house in London, but death struck again and she was needed, for 'the second Mother' died and back she went to run the Scrope family.

Presently Gervase Scrope married a third wife and Mrs Cresswell was then free to set up her own household at Sidbury.

The new wife was not as welcome to the daughters as the second one had been and there were tears and lamentations at grannie's departure.

'It was a cruel Separation nor could Reflection on the Reason of her going lessen our Grief. . . .' wrote Betty in the story of her life.

'We did not stay long after, but extremely dejected begged my Father to let us live with her. He who never refused his children anything reasonable, complied and allowed £50 yearly for our Board.'

It turned out a satisfactory marriage and the elder girl elected later to return, while Betty remained with her grandmother, more one suspects because she did not enjoy playing second fiddle to her sister than for any feeling against her step-mother for she assures us she could have gone back too.

She was thirteen when her father remarried but there is a glimpse of her when younger with her cousins, the two Cresswell boys.

In later years Thomas wrote to her brother:

> I particularly remember a conversation that passed between your sisters, my brother and myself at your father's house in Litchfield St when we were all children.
>
> We all agreed in this one Opinion that we would not marry anyone we did not love, nor anyone that did not love us. My Brother asked your sister Betty, who was not then above ten years of age, how she could be sure that a man loved her? She answered 'If he had a superior fortune', which we all thought a very good Reason and were all determined to bring it to the Test. Have you not often heard your Father repeat this remarkable Speech (and) that your Grandmother had taught all her Grandchildren to believe they were all Princes and Princesses.

Betty maliciously added a sidelight: Her father, she said, had met his nephews by chance in Westminster 'who were just then turned out of doors, their Schooling and Boarding having been for Years unpaid. He brought them home and they constantly eat with us until my Grandmother provided otherways for them.'

This was in 1726–27. The boys were probably on their way to their uncle's house, knowing their grandmother to be there.

A few years later poor Mrs Cresswell was again bereaved. In

1729 Richard, her elder Cresswell grandson died, shortly after his brother had gone to India. Nothing more is known of this lad except that he left a daughter who grew up to marry Long of Bainton, Wilts. M.P. but his grandmother succumbed with grief and lay seriously ill, her life in danger. She was moved to Lincoln where she made a slow recovery and it was on her return to Sidbury that Betty made her decision to live with her.

Among the family portraits is one with the caption 'Miss Lee of Coton who married a Cresswell'. The painting is dated by her dress so she could only have married Black Dick's younger brother Thomas, born *circa* 1690, who died between 1708 and 1723 or his son Richard who died in 1729. Her family would have arranged a second marriage and she faded from history, but had young Richard's child been a son and the heir of Pinkney and Sidbury the sequence of events in this narrative would have been very different.

So far it has been rather a bare bone despite its changing background but now, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the family staged a lively and passionate drama that has survived more than two hundred years to come down to us in their own words.

When young Thomas Estcourt Cresswell came home from the east in 1732 aged twenty, his expectations had been considerably altered by his brother's death, but he was still lamentably short of money. Pinkney was mortgaged, and Sidbury was his grandmother's jointure, so it was essential to remain in business and make money with which to recoup the family fortunes, liquidated by his father.

His grandmother was determined he should make a good marriage for he bore, 'a most extraordinary good character' and 'was her Joy'.

A contemporary wrote that the father 'had carefully instructed his son in those branches of Trade in which he himself had been principally concerned; thus he eased himself of a great part of the load of business and transferred it to his son . . . (who) was chief in all things; for his Talents being naturally turned for Trade and himself of a parsimonious temper, his father confided in him for the management of all his concerns.'

It is easy to imagine the pleasure and excitement aroused by his homecoming.

Betty Scrope tells us that he spent a whole year at Sidbury except for a short absence 'about his India affairs'.

Very little is known of his life outside, except that when the Bridgnorth election campaign of 1733 opened, he was made a Burgess. Not much more than twenty-one, it was nonetheless the age at which his father and in the future his son became M.P.s, but it was to be another twenty years before he could enter politics himself.

Betty was now sixteen and a wholly delightful flirtation sprang up between them, as was only to be expected.

It was perhaps the happiest year of her life, but she lost her heart irrevocably, falling deeply in love with her older, sophisticated cousin, who found her companionship charming and paid her marked attention.

Her heart was never her own again, but in his young male arrogance he took it all for granted and was at this stage, she tells us, 'indifferent' not 'particular'.

Mrs Cresswell viewed the attachment with displeasure and made it quite clear that she did not approve.

'During this long Visit,' wrote Betty, 'I do not remember once sitting down that he did not take the next chair, nay, he has frequently stood at the back of mine half-an-hour or longer till one by me has been vacant. I never went on horseback but I met him in the Fields or at the Door watching my return. My Grandmother complained harshly that in my absence they had none of her Grandson's company.'

There was talk of Betty returning to Lincoln but poor Grannie 'desired' she would not think of leaving her, 'Tommy says if you go he will never come to Sidbury again'.

Betty stayed and business called her cousin to London, but the pattern of his visits was always the same.

Mrs Cresswell so dreaded not seeing him that she was at pains to keep her grand-daughter with her and this dangerous situation continued for over six years.

For the girl it was serious. She pined and became ill from the nervous tension of unrequited love and the weight of opposition.

No one in those days troubled over a young girl's feelings.

Mrs Cresswell exacted a promise from Tommy that he would neither court nor engage his cousin and they understood each other perfectly on the desirability of marrying a suitable heiress, as was customary.

There are many details painting in the picture, for in the years to come, all and sundry burst into print and all their stories in the main agree.

One such printed a letter from the old lady to her grandson:

> Dear Grandchild
>
> Your Aunt has acquainted me with her Suspicions that your Cousin is deeply in love with you, with several Circumstances that convinced her that she regretted nothing so much as her parting with you when her father ordered her into the country.
>
> I formerly told you my own Thoughts upon the same head and you then gave me your Promise that you would not marry her nor any other Lady without my Consent.
>
> I am satisfied: but I know so well the Lures, Deceits and Practices of my own sex when inspired by the Passion of Love and assisted by Opportunity and Intimacy, that you will excuse my Fears and Apprehensions lest you should by her female Wiles have engaged in a Contract which you must be sensible is diametrically opposed to your Interest.
>
> Her Fortune is but a Trifle in comparison with your Expectations. Will you then suffer the Bauble Love to stand in competition with that Wealth and Splendour which you are sure to possess if you marry a Lady of equal Opulence. Remember that Riches bring a thousand Conveniences with them and will command Happiness when Love, united with Poverty, lives destitute of every Pleasure but what it finds in its own unenvied, though perhaps pitied, Condition.
>
> Who would embrace Misery when Felicity is their Option? Who would prefer a trifling and momentary Bliss for substantial and continued Happiness? Let not Passion blind you.... Drive her from your Thoughts.... (etc) ... But I shall defer any further Advice till I am entirely satisfied under your own Hand, whether my Fears and Suspicions are well or ill-grounded. I am etc.

Thomas Estcourt Cresswell began his narrative of what happened 'a little after Christmas 1734'. Betty Scrope put him right, affirming it was 1735, but more than 225 years later, it no longer matters. The fascination lies in the window they have opened on a bye-gone age.

For these are people who actually lived; These were their

circumstances and these their reactions. They were human beings, of private station as they termed it, neither heroes nor cads, but jars of mixed atoms, not so very different from their predecessors nor from ourselves today.

Thomas Cresswell wrote his narrative some years later, not for publication, which he sought to avoid, but in self-defence, to clarify his mind and memory when scandal had reared its ugly head and he first became aware that he was being accused of crime and in serious danger.

It was addressed to the head of the Scrope family, Betty's eldest brother Gervase, and was not published until the end of 1747. Betty wrote her reply in the following year.

When the story began Tom was twenty-two, Betty eighteen and Mrs Cresswell in her late sixties.

Wrote Thomas:

A little after Christmas 1734, as I was reading of Prayers in the Family at Sidbury, I heard a sudden Noise, turn'd my Head about and saw your Sister, your poor unfortunate Sister, lay flat on the Floor. I instantly jumped up and took her in my Arms, your brother Fred was in the Room. When she came to herself again she enquired how she came, seated as she was, and we told her the Accident. Presently after she cried out 'Good God, Cousin, I am going to die, farewell for ever, farewell Fred; and again went into a Fit.

Fred and I both really thought so, she never having had a Fit before; he fell a crying; I cried not but was excessively shocked, having then the same and as great a Regard for her as though she had been my Sister. This repeatedly happened three or four Times in the same Manner; at length I observed that Fred's Crying concerned that then good-natured Creature, even in her Agonies; I chid Fred severely which turned his Passion another way, I suppose, for it prevented his Crying. We carried her upstairs and had her put to Bed.

After she was in bed we went to see how she did. Her Fits had not as yet quite left her, but they were much shorter and the Intervals between them much longer than before.

As I was sitting on the Bedside by her, she violently seized one of my Hands and clasped it to her Side and with Vehemence said, '*it is here, it is here*;' I pressed as hard as I could, having observed her Father do so many years ago in Litchfield St, when she was out of order; But not observing that it did any good, I ceased pressing and took my Hand away; afterwards, she in a more gentle Manner took my Hand, put it near the same place again and more gently said '*it is here, it is here*;' so I let my Hand remain but pressed not; In

a little time a Warmth suffused itself over her Hands, Face, Breasts and I suppose her whole Body; Her Fits left her and she became chearful.

As I ever had a great Opinion of Exercise, particularly of Riding on Horseback, I prescribed that to her and she, Fred and I every day indulged ourselves in this innocent Amusement till she was quite recovered. Then we all came to London together, your Father lodging then in Warwick Court.

As I had then as violent a Passion for the Play as you have now, I very seldom saw your Sister; I remember but once, except in company with your Father and then we had no Discourse of Love, Matrimony, or any Thing like it. She was learning to dance and your Father when he went out of Town left her at my Uncle Moreton's, where I lived, that she might perfect herself in that Art.

Summer and Horse Races came on. I never missed any that are frequented by Londoners, therefore was but little at home. Never once, as I can remember, at that Time of her being in London, did I ever go with her to any Place of Diversion.

When she went out of Town, Fred who had taken a place in the Lincoln Stage Coach and who was to meet us at the Inn, told us, or your Sister told me, a wrong Time, for she and I were at the Inn alone full two Hours before the Stage Coach set out or Fred came; But we had no Discourse of Love or any Thing particular as I can remember; Yet at this Place I kissed her three or four Times, having in my Life never done so before, except saluting her at proper Seasons can be called so; Never had taken her by the Hand as I sat by her, but once, and though your Grandmother came into the Room she did not offer to take it away, but dropped a Handkerchief on both our Hands, by which I understood that she disliked not the Thing, yet she had rather my Grandmother did not see it; but I had often felt her Breasts, she frequently desiring me to do it, saying it would make them grow.

Presently, after she went out of Town, my Aunt Moreton told me that she was sure Betty Scrope was in love with me, because she was so very unhappy at the Thoughts of leaving London, where she had no Pleasure or Diversion, to go to Lincoln where she would have a great deal; that though she pretended that it was the Thoughts of leaving her, yet she was sure that it was for leaving of me.

She then asked me whether I had ever talked to her of Love or Matrimony; I assured her that I never had and that I was sure she could have no Thoughts of marrying me, for it was the constant Discourse of my Grandmother and me, that I should be absolutely ruined if I married a Woman of small Fortune and that I always declared I would not.

Being, as I aforesaid, very much from Home, I had not taken Notice of her great Uneasiness, so I enquired into the Manner of

her Behaviour and found out that had she lost all her Friends and Relations she could not have shown more concern; Yet she never had before me, not even when I parted with her at the Inn.

This brought into my Mind her Behaviour after her Fit. The Day after she had that Fit my Grandmother took me into the Great Parlour and made me promise I would never marry her. These Considerations made me fancy that possibly she might love me and thoroughly rooted it in my Memory.

At that Time my Grandmother and I constantly corresponded and when she knew that your Sister had left London, she freely in her Letters talked to me about her, charged me with a Design of marrying her; I assured her I would not and desired her never to let her come to Sidbury again, which she partly promised me; Yet the next Time I went to Sidbury, I found her there.

She was in good health when I came, but gradually she faded away and was reduced to a mere Shadow.

I consulted the Doctor that attended her and he assured me that unless she altered she would quickly die; that he had tried all the Medicines that he could think of and he despaired of her.

I then seriously reflected what I had best to do and came to this Resolution; to tell her that I would marry her and when she was recovered to assure her it was impossible and advise her never to see me more.

Although the intention was good, could any resolution have been more cruel to a sensitive girl and it is clear how little his own heart was involved at this stage. He continues:

This I performed and without any Apology or Preface whatever said two or three Words on which she almost instantaneously recovered and I left her and went to London; At which Place I next saw her, behaved very surlily and brutishly to her, saw her as seldom as I possibly could; which she observing desired me to talk with her alone. She told me she knew why I behaved so, gave me up my Promise and assured me that she herself would not marry to her own Ruin any Man in the World unless she loved him, which she was sure I did not her; that she would go to Lincoln, never see me more and endeavour to conquer her Passion.

To Lincoln she went, where she had I believe a violent Fit of Illness and on her Recovery was advised to go into Shropshire for a Change of Air, which Advice she followed; for I never was at Sidbury but she was there, always found her well and left her ill, through Love as she told me.

Betty, stung by this account, supplied her own version:

A little after Christmas 1735 while Prayers were reading I had this Fit, occasioned by bleeding with Leeches in the Morning for the

Toothache. They bled all Day and the loss of Blood so sunk my Spirits that in the Evening I complained of an uncommon Lowness, which none regarded till they saw me fall.

A contemporary account painted in the scene: Betty was gazing in rapt adoration at 'Tommy' who suddenly noticing exclaimed 'Lord, Cousin, what is it that you stare so'!

The general lull in the conversation and all eyes turned on her caused her to blush violently and then faint. She goes on:

Mr Cresswell I believe did take me up for he told me next Day of my Grandmother's Anger at his extreme Care.

Everything in the Narrative is most certainly false, not that I was sensible for many Hours; but this I know, that on coming to myself I saw my Grandmother, Mrs Huggeford, Mrs Scott, Mr Cresswell and Fred all in my Room; Mr Cresswell not near my Bed, nor do I suppose he ever had been.

We generally rode out when the Weather permitted, chiefly on my Brother's account; my Fit was not followed by any illness. He was just recovered from a violent Fever in which Mr Cresswell one Day declared him in great Danger 'for he was delirious and called him Brother'. My Grandmother in great Fury replied 'That was no Sign of his being light-headed, if he was not so yet, no doubt Fred knew he would be e'er long'!

In the Spring we went to Town. I lived with my Father in Warwick Court where Mr Cresswell frequently dined and attended us to Plays.

My Mother-in-law [stepmother] I am sure thought that he courted me and in my Presence told my Father so, who directly asked me if it was true? I blushed and made no Reply; I could not answer positively; Mr Cresswell had made no Declaration and they saw his Behaviour. I owned enough by my Silence.

My Father smiled and said 'Betty, don't be confused, Tom Cresswell is a sober Lad. His Fortune at my Mother Cresswell's Death will be sufficient and I shall be very well pleased with the Match.'

At my Aunt Moreton's his Behaviour was so particular that my Aunt took Notice, but not in the Manner he describes I daresay. How different is his Account from the Truth, even in this Trifle; he was indeed at Newmarket or Epsom Races, but not at both; those finished he returned and was not again absent from London before or after my Stay; hardly ever dined out, never supped but once and though he returned not till four in the Morning, rose at seven to attend me to Islington, which he constantly did during that Season of drinking the Water.

Betty's concentration on detail betrays her devotion, but to her cousin she was still only an attractive feature of home life.

In August he did go with me to the Inn and waited near two Hours before the Coach set out. He expressed great Concern at my Going and declared again 'he would never go to Sidbury till he heard of my being there'. I only said 'My Grandmother does not like it and my Father wishes me at Home, where if Health permit me I must stay'.

At Parting I received a Salute which was the only Liberty he ever attempted taking with me till many years after....

Lincoln air was always too sharp for me and the Physician positively told my Father I must go to Shropshire or die.

I first went to London and stayed a fortnight with my Aunt. Mr Cresswell had been sent for, a few Days before, to my Grandmother who it was thought lay a-dying. Feb. (1737). I was very weak when I came to Sidbury but recovered daily, the warm weather coming on and that Air always agreeing with me.

In the Autumn I went to my Father at Bath and thence with him in the Spring to London. My Father's Stay in Town was not a Fortnight and mine but three Days longer waiting the Stage to return to my Grandmother, who then lived at Bridgnorth.

All the Stuff relating to my giving up any Promise, desiring to talk with him alone etc is false, there being at that Time no Promise or Engagement between us. In point of Judgement and Integrity I thought him the first Man in the World, but I loved him not, nor was he disagreeable to me.

In the Summer we returned to Sidbury, where he immediately came, having heard of Mr Lee's Courtship.

Thomas Cresswell's narrative:

Once when I was there (Sidbury) but whether before or after your Sister Deloraine was a Widow, I can't tell. Betty W . . . said to me that one Day or another I should meet a Man in the Fields with a Bag, that would come and carry Miss Scrope away.*

By which mysterious Speech I understood that some Gentleman was making his Addresses to Miss Scrope.

Talking to my Grandmother about it she told me that Mr Lee had behaved very particularly to Miss Scrope but had said nothing either to her or to Miss Scrope relating to Marriage; That Mrs R . . . and several others at Bridgnorth thought that Mr Lee designed making his Addresses to her and that Mrs R . . . had advised her not to hearken to them; That she, as she had a great Opinion of Mrs R . . . thought so too. These are very near if not exact my Grandmother's Words.

I then told her that if she had any Value or Respect for me

* A note here explains that the Fields were the grounds, so called, in the road between Sidbury and Coton and that Mr Lee of Coton Hall at that time wore a Bag Wig.

she ought to do everything in her Power to forward it; that as to point of Fortune it was a great Match for Miss Scrope; and she promised me she would.

Sometime after your Sister began talking to me about it, for I was determined never to begin with her.

After she had with great Sincerity told me all she knew about it, which amounted to Nothing, I advised her to marry him if she could; She flew out into a violent Passion at me which ended in Tears; told me that if he was the last of Man the Human Race should fail; that of all Men she ever saw she hated him the worst; that his Hands and Feet resembled those of a Baboon and that it hurt her Eyes and gave her a Pain to look at him.

Here we kissed and were Friends (I then believed her Constant) which had some Effect on mine and my Grandmother's Behaviour when Mr Lee and his Sister came to Sidbury.

But when I saw your Sister give him as much Encouragement as a modest, prudent Girl should, I doubted her Sincerity; and when she and I returned the Visit—we stayed longer by some Days than Mr Lee did at Sidbury—I behaved in a different Manner; and I am sure at that Time that one of Mr Lee's Sisters did not think herself quite indifferent to me, (though as from that Time to this I have not taken any the least particular Notice of her, she may possibly have forgot it) neither was she so; and had she had the Fortune equivalent I should have told her so.

Mr Lee never returned this Visit, for what Reason I know not.

So there they were, Betty and Tom, playing with fire, hoping to make each other jealous, and Mr Lee, faint-hearted and discouraged, withdrew from the stage, alas, for several years. He was only eighteen in 1737 Lancelot Lee Esq. of Coton Hall near Bridgnorth, the architect and prime mischief-maker of the future scandal. Betty tells us that her grandmother saw fit to stop any direct proposal from Mr Lee by telling him nobody must think of her grand-daughter without a large allowance for pin-money. Rather daunting for a young man already responsible for his mother, seven sisters and two young brothers.

His own account will come later.

A very fine group of the Lee family was painted by Highmore in 1736. Lancelot, a slight foppish figure of serious mien, stands between two sisters, taller than himself, one of whom holds his hand to present him to his Mother on the attainment of his majority, aged seventeen. She had managed the family estates on his behalf since the death of her husband Eldred Lancelot

Lee, whose portrait hangs on the wall behind her seated figure, surrounded by their ten children.

The girl with the garland in the foreground was her father's favourite daughter. The mother, a lady of character, lived to a great age and would have been as anxious for her son to choose a bride of ample fortune as was Mrs Cresswell for her grandson.

Betty said that she well remembered Mrs Woolley's joke 'as well as Mr Cresswell's melancholy on the Occasion'.

She did not deny the unflattering description of Mr Lee—'the Expressions Mr Cresswell charges to me and *much worse* were continually used by the Family'—which indicates that somehow young Lee lacked charm.

According to Betty they frequently visited Mrs Lee and her daughters at Bridgnorth, 'but there was never any Appointment with Mr Lee. His Addresses to me were entirely ended'.

Tom Cresswell relates an odd incident on the last day of the visit to Coton. Betty wrote that they had been much pressed to stay longer and evidently their host was an arbitrary young man.

> The last Day we were there I went a-hunting with him and several People, who assured me that they wanted to go home that Night, but they could not unless I went, which it would be impossible for me to do unless I took care that my Horse should not be locked up; for Mr Lee at that Time indulged himself in a foolish Custom of keeping his Visitors by real and actual Force;
>
> These People wrought on Mr Lee and me up to that Pitch that it became a Trial of Skill between us, whether I should go or not; But to go I was determined, having actual Business to do the next Day in Shrewsbury.
>
> Therefore I ordered my Grandmother's Servant to take particular Care to put any one Horse of the three in a Place where he was sure to come at him; This he attempted and meant doing; He thought himself wise and assured me I should have a Horse if he watched him all the Time, yet he was disappointed, and when I spoke with him he scratched his Head and looked very foolish.
>
> I then went out myself and discovered an unthought of and never-used Way through another Building into the Loft of the Stable, into which I descended, broke open the Door and took my Horse; which having done I mounted him and was soon met by Mr Lee whom I saluted in the most civil, complaisant Manner I could, and gave him a true, sincere and hearty Invitation to Sidbury.
>
> Mr Lee knows that at that Time he freely talked to me of his

Affairs and in some Measure followed my Advice, and I believe now sincerely wishes he had in others, which if he had done and kept his Promises, he had not stood Candidate for Bridgnorth.*

Some little Time afterwards and on a very wet and rainy Day, your Sister and I, notwithstanding she was just recovered from a violent Cold, went by Appointment to meet Mr Lee at his Mother's House at Bridgnorth, but he disappointed us.

This is all I know of this pretended Courtship, never having been in company with your Sister and Mr Lee since, except last Summer once at Coton. Why then does your Sister and Mr Lee charge me with having prevented their marrying? Your Sister by saying that I then first engaged her, which made her refuse Mr Lee, which she knows to be a Lye and so does he, for he never asked her; Then consequently she could not refuse him; Neither would she have done it, unless I would have immediately married her.

When your Sister Deloraine was first a Widow she will, I daresay, do me the Justice to own that I used my utmost Endeavours to prevail with her to engage her Sister to live with her by way of Companion. She asked your Sister to do it, but she refused her, yet I was very near succeeding in my Scheme of forcing her to it.

It was thus determined the Night before Lady Deloraine left Sidbury, as you yourself may possibly remember; Lady Deloraine, yourself and me pressing your Sister Betty to go, my Grandmother not asking her to stay in consequence of a Promise she had made me. Betty said 'I must go for my Grandmother does not ask me to stay'. Said Mrs Scott and Mrs Huggeford 'If it comes to that Madam, you must ask her'; I frowned upon my Grandmother and prevented her for some Time, yet at last she did ask and Betty stayed.

From this time I remember Nothing remarkable that passed between your Sister and me till the first Winter that we came to Pinkney [1740].

Betty denied all this:

1739. In the Spring Lord Deloraine died in Bath and my Sister desired I would meet her in Town. I went and excepting the first night at my Aunt Moreton's was with her the whole time, five or six weeks. Mr Cresswell visited us frequently nor was his Behaviour at all altered. One Day, when we were alone he began abruptly to complain of his Circumstances—that he was greatly dissatisfied—that he loved me to Distraction—but was so poor that our Marriage would be the utter Ruin of us both and therefore wished me to release him. So sudden a Declaration shocked me for he was not now indifferent as he had been. However I made no Complaints and

* Mr Lee was an ardent Tory and still a Jacobite, and the Whigs were in power.

as readily as my Confusion would permit released him. I went with my Sister to Lincoln where we staid six Weeks. She desired to pay my Grandmother a Visit.

While they were at Sidbury Betty claimed a private engagement was on again and directly contradicting her cousin, said that her grandmother pressed her very strongly to stay, saying that her sister could not want her at Lincoln and now she was so old she could not live without her.

I was very dull when my Sister left us and could not forget the Conversation in Town. From this Time his Behaviour was extremely tender.

She added a note from Gervase to the effect that it would have been improper to leave their grandmother alone and that he himself accompanied his sister Deloraine in the chariot. Lancelot Lee got the statement out of him in the years ahead when he was planning to prosecute Cresswell.

It is from Betty we learn that Thomas had succeeded in getting the Pinkney estate out of the hands of Sir Abraham Elton and had prevailed on his grandmother to live there with him saying: 'By the help of her Income to keep his House, he should soon be in a very good way—that his Rents would go in Repairs and Improvements at first, but in a little while he should save Money.'

And so in that fateful winter of 1740 they all came to Pinkney and the affair began.

Supposing Tom Cresswell to have known the origin of the Pinkney Skull, he was far too matter of fact in character to have believed it could have any occult influence, nor would he have jettisoned his estate for a superstition; but it is not possible to believe it had belonged to his mother.

He was about five years old when she died and probably he and his brother had rather a neglected and loveless boyhood. They would have had no feelings about an Estcourt relic, whether it dated from 1688 or 1636 or more anciently from the Pinkney Chapel. But their mother and her sister could have quarrelled over their father and the story have been exaggerated by later generations and attached to the skull.

The journey to Pinkney would have required considerable organization.

Those who could would have ridden or gone in the post-chaises, but old Mrs Cresswell and her elderly companions would have lumbered along in the coach or chariot over the seventy odd miles of muddy rutted road that separated Sidbury in Shropshire from Pinkney in Wiltshire.

The route was nearly due south, across Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, to Cheltenham or Gloucester and down through Cirencester to Malmesbury, and with her household and all their belongings there would have been a prodigious cavalcade.

At that period there were posting houses every ten or twelve miles on all the main roads, where post horses for private carriages could be hired from stage to stage.

The gentry used their own horses to the first posting house out and from the last one in, so that journeys up to twenty-three or twenty-four miles could be negotiated without undue cost, but the longer journeys, requiring post horses were expensive, as usually two pairs of horses and two post boys to return them, would be needed.

The posts were open all night and the horses harnessed in and out with amazing speed, but Mrs Cresswell probably stopped at least one night on her way.

Betty's account:

> Soon after we were fixed at Pinkney I found my Grandmother strongly pressed him to marry a Woman with Money; not anyone in particular, but to look out for somebody. Far from doing this he was more public in his Attention to me.
>
> This was very disagreeable to her and truly made my Life extremely unhappy. I insisted he would let me live with my Father; he did not readily comply; however on my further Uneasiness and strict Promise to keep my Engagement he consented.
>
> The Time for the Journey was fixed when to my unspeakable Grief I had the melancholy News of my Father's Death [July 1741].
>
> This was the greatest Affliction I had then known and indeed the Cause of all my future Misery, by preventing my intended Journey.
>
> I was almost inconsolable.
>
> During the first Winter at Pinkney my Health was tolerably

good. After my Father's Death, in the low-spirited way I was, we frequently aired in the Coach.

One Day, the Coachman being out, Mr Cresswell drove. At our Return he helped me to my Chamber for I had for some Time been too feeble to walk alone. Coming in, a Servant told us Company was in the Parlour. My Grandmother as well as he, saw me to my Chamber. I was then in so weak a Condition that my Life was thought in Danger.

This was a very reticent reply to her cousin's narrative and could hardly be otherwise.

As usual he was not so precise over detail and dated the incident earlier, before her father's death.

He wrote:

She had been low spirited for some Time. I had no Pretence of Business at London, therefore could not leave her, yet I took no Notice of her till accidentally coming home at the same Time as she and my Grandmother returned from an Airing, I observed her stagger as she was walking into the House and would have been down had I not run and catched her and it was with Difficulty I got her upstairs to her Chamber.

I took her in my Arms and kissed her and said 'Betty you had better let me lie with you' and I had then done it, but at that Instant a Servant came upstairs and told me there was Company below.

I answered 'I will come presently'. In about the Space a Man can count twenty there came another, to whom I gave the same Answer; and in about the same Space my Grandmother came up, so I went downstairs to them.

The next Day I took my Horse and went to my Cousin Carter's on purpose to be out of the Way.

I returned the Sunday following, stayed at home in the Afternoon whilst the Family were gone to Church to post my Accounts, which I as regularly then did every Sunday, as any Merchant in England; your Sister alone with me in the Room and I took no Notice of her; upon which she, in a violent Passion went upstairs to her own Room, stayed some little Time and came down again; I still at my Accounts took no Notice of her, upon which she said 'Good God, Cousin, what will you think of me'; I instantly jumped up, stopped her speaking farther by Kisses and told her I thought her as virtuous a Girl as any in England.

That Instant the Coach came from the Church to the Gate, so no more passed at that Time.

She recovered this Bout which was in the Spring of the Year and got very well again and I prevailed with her to go and live

with her Father at Lincoln and had your Father lived a little longer, she had gone.

Betty was evidently a very delicate girl, an additional reason perhaps for Mrs Cresswell's opposition to marriage with her only Cresswell grandson. In her 'answer' Betty wrote:

. . . he might for all I know make his Cousin Carter a Visit at the Time and return on a Sunday. I remember his staying from Church one Afternoon when Ill-Health kept me at home; His Books of Accounts were before him; When my Grandmother went to Church I went up Stairs and did not come down till I heard the Chariot. He complained of my Unkindness in leaving him alone; 'I thought you was busy'; 'That was while Grannie staid and as we have so few Opportunities of Talking, you should not have left me.' She came in and put an end to our Conversation.

That summer (1741) their Uncle Moreton came to Pinkney for a stay of several months, cocked an eye at Betty and made her promise to go with him as far as Cirencester on his way back to London. She told Tommy in the hope he would go with them, but he refused, which made her refuse their uncle; but he, telling of it at supper one night before he left, made the whole company fall on Tom and force him to comply.

Tom wrote:

To my certain Knowledge I had not been alone with her for more than six Months. When we were in the Chariot together coming home, she began talking with me of Love etc. We came to the following Agreement viz. that I should lie with her; that if I got her with Child I would marry her; but if not and she was by those Means relieved of her Disorders, she should permit me to marry another Woman.

She promised she would deal honourably and suffer me to do so if she was so relieved.

We were to meet the following Evening in an unfrequented Chamber that either of us could go to without anyone taking Notice of it—it being the little Room at the end of the Long Gallery—a little after 5 oclock, at which Hour, my Grandmother, as you know, constantly went into her Bedchamber to Prayer for an Hour.

Therefore you must know that this Hour I could every Day of my Life, have spent with your Sister.

A Quarter after Five I came into the House, looked into the Parlour, held the Door in my Hand, saw your Sister alone, asked her why she was not in the little Room?

She told me she was afraid: 'Don't then' said I, shut the Door and left her.

After this your Sister took it into her Head to walk every Night by herself under the Piazza, having first taken Care to shut the little Parlour Window Shutters and to leave open the Long Gallery and Bowling Green Doors.

Here she constantly met me as I came home of an Evening, before I could get into the House and we walked together under the Piazza, unseen and unknown by Anybody.

Here, kissing of her and toying with her, she told me the Long Gallery Door was open and you yourself know that from this Place we might with great Secrecy have retired, through the Bowling Green and Long Gallery Doors into the little Room aforesaid.

Yet during one whole Month that she continued this Practice I did not once ask her, nor she me, though I don't suppose the Long Gallery Door was not constantly left open, for she never told me so, but the first Night.

Yet however, here we met, here we talked, here we kissed and toyed, till the cold Weather came on and prevented us.

She became ill again and this was the only Illness she ever had which she did not attribute to my Brutality and Ill-Usage of her, which she now entirely acquitted me of; for as she was much concerned for your Father's Death, I behaved with great Kindness, Tenderness and Humanity to her.

At the Beginning of this Illness I received a Letter from Lord Ducie [his cousin] telling me he believed I might have a certain young Lady: which Letter I did not answer till after my Return from Sidbury, to which Place I purposely went to be out of the Way.

When I came back your Sister was pretty well recovered. I showed her the Letter and asked what Answer I should give.

The Letter made her Illness return with greater Violence than ever. She was really to be pitied; as she told me herself, she did not sleep for sixteen Nights together; she was in perpetual and eternal Convulsions, making horrible and unnatural Noises, which wrought on my Grandmother's Pity—who till now ever scolded her when she was in this Way, till I by Force turned her out of the Room.—And she would suffer me, nay, even ask me, to be alone with her—which whenever I was and began to kiss her, in a Minute's Time she would be easy.

It was observed by the whole Family that Nothing could quiet her but my being alone with her; So whenever her Fits came on they instantly left the Room if I was in it and your Sister would be at Ease, as I said before, in a Minute's Time or less.

I proposed lying with her; She would not consent but on Terms, which were these: That I should marry any other Woman, after-

wards marry her, reserve for her and her Issue if she had any by me, the Sidbury Estate; I to live sometimes with the one and sometimes with the other.

One Night when I came home, I was surprised that your Sister had changed Rooms with Mrs. Huggeford; the Reason of which Change was because in the Night-time I could not come into that which she left, without Danger of my Grandmother hearing, whereas I might and have, into that that she went into, many a hundred Times without my Grandmother's or any Body except your Sister knowing.

This Night she gave me a Letter, desiring me to come to her about 1 oclock with my Breeches on, to explain the Terms.

I went without my Breeches on and when we had talked for some Time she asked me to come to Bed with her, which I did and lay with her.

Her Reflections on what she had done were very tormenting to her and prevented her quick Recovery; presently after she desired me not to come to her and I ceased doing of it.

The next Sunday in the Afternoon she prevailed with me to read over the Marriage Ceremony and when it was over I lay with her. She told me she might have placed Jenny (her grandmother's maid) in the Closet and this would have been a lawful Marriage, but that she scorned it, she had too much Generosity to do it; But had she attempted it, it would have been in vain for I took Care to know where every single Person belonging to the Family were, before I ventured at it.

She quickly recovered and I put off the other Match; neither has she ever since been ill in the same Manner.

Betty refuted yet corroborated this account. She dismissed most of it as 'of so infamous a nature and so extremely indecent that her Sex denied her the Privilege of expatiating upon it' and she concentrated on details.

Returning from Cirencester they had discussed her cousin's prudent fit (as he called it) of marrying a woman with money, which he hoped she would forgive.... Her grandmother frequently walked with her under the Piazza and with Mr Cresswell she had often walked alone. It was as public as any walk in the country could be, in sight of all coming to the house . . . he had withheld the letter from Lord Ducie lest it give her pain and had not dared tell his grandmother, but on his return from Sidbury they had decided he must go and see Lord Ducie and acquaint Mrs Cresswell 'lest they should suspect some other Engagement'.

On his return from Lord Ducie, he told me with a very chearful Face, it was at an End. He excepted to the Fortune and had done with that troublesome Affair without the Pain of seeing the Lady.

She declared that she changed her room because her first room at Pinkney was a very bad one,

exceeding small, no Closet and a terrible smoaking Chimney. He made many Excuses for putting me in it, but said it was only till the House was fitted up. Indeed the whole Room could only have been designed for a Servant to be near that my Grandmother laid in. I lay one Winter in it, tho' very inconvenient and had my Health continued should not have complained. At the beginning of the following Winter, when extreme Illness had for Weeks confined me to this one disagreeable Spot and even my Illness was increased by being frequently obliged to sit without a Fire on account of the Smoak, I complained to my Grandmother and desired another Room.

Her Maid spoke to Mrs Huggeford, who they thought might do better at this Time than I could in a small one and that, without any direction of mine, was ordered for me. Returning from an Airing one day, I found there all my Things.

My Illness increased and for sixteen Weeks I was not out of this Chamber, not even airing.

The whole Family always breakfasted and Meals excepted sat the rest of the Day with me.

Her account of the midnight visit is of an unsuccessful attempt at seduction, but it is quite clear that her conscience and her fears troubled her exceedingly.

I cried incessantly and nothwithstanding the Presence of the Family, gave way to immoderate Grief; I really for a Time was mad; for though I had not the least Consciousness of actual Guilt, yet my Consent to his Coming was perpetually in my Thoughts, to which I imputed his Behaviour. I beat myself,—I wrung my Hands,—tore my Hair,—and that without any Regard to whoever was present.

I wanted to tell my Grandmother, but was afraid, and ashamed to begin; she, by her Behaviour I now think, was as unwilling to hear; dreading to know an Engagement which she was determined by any Method, to end.

In the Afternoon, sitting on the Side of my Bed, she began: 'For God's sake, Miss, what can you mean by this mad Behaviour? Your Fortune is very sufficient, and few young People are so happy in the Opinion of the World.'

I eagerly caught the Opportunity, and resolved to utter all my Complaints; catching hold of her Hand, I cried, 'Oh God! my dear Grandmother, I have greater Afflictions than ever Woman laboured

under; pray hear me patiently, and then give me your Advice and Help—Mr Cresswell—' The Moment his Name was mentioned, she grew red with Anger, and snatching her Hand from me, hastily left the Room.

In five Minutes he came, acquainted with all that had passed, for he expostulated vehemently with me on my Design of telling. He then spoke very submissively, begging me not to expose him, since he waited only my Recovery for our publick Marriage till which Time, if I would read the Ceremony privately he would not once mention my receiving him as a Husband.

Although she was better, her mind was so disturbed that she said for sixteen days and nights she did not sleep. . . . Sometimes the behaviour of the family in leaving her alone with him, made her less unhappy at the thought that her grandmother might consent to the Marriage, but her 'easy Moments were ever very short' and her cousin seemed dissatisfied at being so often alone with her. 'His Coolness was plain, though he endeavoured to hide it'. She complained to him of lack of sleep and he advised her to take some Laudanum . . . 'he believed I made myself worse that my Grandmother might find out the Cause'.

Worn out by her unhappiness she described how she tried to take an overdose.

After I was in Bed and the Family gone, I drank a great deal plain, out of the Bottle. Within a Quarter of an Hour I was overcome with Sleep; but was afraid to indulge it. I knew my Design and dreaded the Thought of waking no more. . . . I was not able to rise so knocked with my Shoe for a Servant who sat up in a Room under mine; I bid her tell Mr Cresswell I wanted to speak with him immediately. He came; and she by my Orders left the Room. I told him what I had taken, and begged something might be given to save me. He coolly asked, 'Can you sleep?' I said, 'Yes. Nothing but the Guilt of what I have done prevents me, for I shall never wake again.' He replied 'Sleep, it will do you no Harm'; and without farther Enquiry left me. His Unconcern checked my Desire of Relief: It was in his Power to save my Life, and I thought myself freed from the Crime of Self-murder, by this Application; so directly went to sleep. I waked not till late the next Day, eagerly called for something to eat, and instantly slept again. This continued Three Days and Nights, and excessively frightened my Grandmother and all the Family. None knew the Cause but he who never discovered it . . .

Some years later Lancelot Lee built up this incident into an

accusation of attempted murder and Tom Cresswell gave an explanation.

> The Laudunum Affair was this. I had consulted an eminent Physician on your Sister's Illness, without telling him the Cause, and he said that Laudanum was the best Thing for her and she used to take it in great Quantities, even in those sixteen Days and Nights when she did not sleep; I advised her still to increase the quantity which she did and it answered the Purpose; and when she found she was going to sleep she was surprised, got out of Bed and came to me, desired me to call the Servants and get her some Worm Water to vomit.
>
> I asked her how much she had taken, for I, following Ovid's Advice, never gave her any Medicine.
>
> She told me the Quantity which was not a great deal more than she had usually taken; I bid her not to be frightened but to go to Bed again and sleep, for I was sure it would do her a great Deal of Good: She went to Bed again, slept till Morning, waked, drank Chocolate, slept again, waked, Breakfasted, dosed till Dinner, dined heartily, dosed till Supper, supped well, slept all Night and recovered very fast.
>
> This poor Creature was wonderfully afraid of Death, thinking herself a Sinner, yet at any Time before she would have been glad to die; so in the same Manner, a Day or two after, on a trifling Accident she sent for me to come to her instantly for she was going to die, though she knew I was at the Time reading Prayers to the Family; I went to her in a Moment, alarmed all the House, and when she told me the Thing laughed at her, for it portended Death no more than the cutting of her Finger would have done. She now presently recovered and got quite well again.

From now onwards Betty's conscience did not worry her unduly. Once the Marriage Service had been read, she regarded herself as her cousin's wife. That the ceremony was not legal, was not her fault, and so blameless she entered into a new world of happiness, dreaming of the time when their union might be recognized and refusing absolutely to face facts.

But 'more Trials' were preparing for her. Their neighbour Mr Gore sent from London a proposal of a very advantageous match and Mr Cresswell was so inhumane as to read it to her and show an inclination to consent. The reason he gave was that Sir Abraham Elton, a very considerable creditor, had applied for his money and he needed time to get it, through some friend, and his creditor thinking it likely that he might

from a wife's fortune quickly receive his money, would at least for a short time rest satisfied.

Betty made no complaint but burst into tears and immediately left him. This trial revived all her former misery and again she thought death preferable to her life. In pursuit of it she went down to a little river in the park with the intention of drowning herself and sat down at the root of a tree, ruminating on her afflictions. But the fear of death and the horror of self-murder prevented her. She had been there about three hours when her cousin arrived, holding a large open knife in his hand with which his design (as he told her) was to have killed himself if he had found her dead, for he feared this last trial had turned her head.

Betty replied 'indeed it had' and if he was so wavering, desired tho' the ceremony was read between them that they yet might part, for she could no longer bear such heavy afflictions.

He swore it should be the last, soothing her and entreating her to go to London, on pretext of seeing her brother, and that he would follow in a fortnight.

He would tell his grandmother that he was to court a lady with £10,000, but would go and see his friend, put off the match and marry Betty.

Tom Cresswell had been severely shaken. Twice through hysteria Betty had attempted suicide. What could he do?

He bethought himself of the Fleet.

There were Clergy established in the Fleet who officiated at marriages that could be witnessed and registered to be as binding as any other, but records were not obligatory; and so it was the haven for every kind of secret marriage and for lending an air of bogus respectability to quite ephemeral love affairs.

There is some reason to suppose that in his younger years, when he had been too gay and preoccupied to notice his little cousin, Tom and another lady had already made use of the Fleet in this way, without coming to any harm.

He and his friends did not lead celibate lives, but it was common knowledge that his family was set on a conventional and profitable match for him.

Only Betty described what followed:

He told her the Proposals had been rejected, brought her a

wedding ring and promised to go the next morning to *Doctors Commons* for a Licence. But at noon he appeared, excessively chagrined at having met an old school-fellow in that court, 'whence should he take out a licence, we might as secretly have been married at Sherston Church, for it would be known to all the World'; Therefore he desired they should be married in the Fleet.

At first she objected but when he named several people they knew who had married there and assured her they were all clergymen who officiated in special chapels, where all was very sacred and solemn, she consented, and on 23 April 1742 was married to one who became 'her sure most bitter Enemy'.

This unfortunate day was a Friday. They paid a visit to friends in the Tower, 'staid Tea, left about Seven and walked on the Hill till it was dark'. Thence Mr Cresswell called a coach, she did not hear his directions, but they were set down short of the Fleet and walked there.

> I had no time for Observation, he terrified me by his surly Behaviour, which at that Time I attributed to his Fear of being seen by some of his Acquaintance.

He took her upstairs where there was a clergyman and a woman who officiated as clerk, who she found had been appointed several days before.

When the ceremony was over Mr Cresswell paid them. The clergyman took a book in his hand and demanded the fee for registering the marriage; he refused giving so much and offered a smaller price. This was not accepted and Mr Cresswell said, 'Then it shall not be registered at all'.

The clergyman then applied to Betty but she, not knowing the consequences was indifferent and they left the house, walked about a hundred yards, 'took coach' and went back to their lodgings, which were the same as her brother Scrope's, who had just come to town; and they did not live together as man and wife because their marriage was to remain secret.

> For more than a Month after this I lived as Miss Scrope. Then he for the first Time commanded my Obedience, faithfully promising that if it was necessary our Marriage should be immediately owned. We set out for Pinkney and during the Journey behaved as Relations only. At home he insisted on coming to me once a

Week, after the Family was in Bed. The Carter lay over my Room, who was a married Man and went home every Saturday or Sunday to his Family. This Night Mr Cresswell chose, thinking it safer than when he lay in the Room above, nor did he ever come at any other Time.

But presently he pressed that she should go to him; giving the 'foolish' reason that his room was farther off the servants.

He also reproved her very severely, saying:

'Twas unreasonable to expect he should undergo all the hardship of lying awake so long and then coming in the Cold; that 'twas my Duty to come to him and he commanded me to do so. There was a Frown upon his Face, which always prevented my expostulating. I only said 'Mr Cresswell I will come, and will take Care to keep my Coming private; but if notwithstanding this Care, I am at any Time discovered, I will certainly declare my Marriage.' He replied 'Very well, do so.' After this, once a Week, as he ordered, I went; but my Fears would never let me venture till Two in the Morning, nor even then, without listening at my Door till I was almost starved. This continued but three Weeks; my Brother came down and took us with him to Cheltenham, where he and I stayed three Weeks; Mr Cresswell was sometimes with us and sometimes at Pinkney; seldom present or absent three Days at a Time.

I think about the beginning of September we returned to Pinkney, staid about two Months and then my Brother and I went to Bath.

What Thomas Cresswell wrote about the Fleet marriage was deleted from his narrative by his editor as 'irrelevant', the story already having received wide publicity; but he gave details of the 'advantageous match' proposed by Mr Gore, who seems to have acted as a marriage broker.

Cresswell says he received a letter from a neighbour, who was then in London, telling him he was sure that if he went to town he might marry a young lady with £10,000 fortune; which letter he showed Betty, saw she could not possibly bear the thoughts of it, so assured her he would not.

When he went to see Mr Gore in London he found the lady's fortune was not so much and was annoyed with him:

He then told me that he was informed so, and thought so and did not know but it might be so and desired me to see the Lady, which I refused; upon which he said he would go and talk with his friend again, which he did and then very earnestly begged me to see the

Lady, saying he did not know what might happen; I consented, saw her, she was handsome, very sensible, and as I was informed by a Gentleman of good Sense and true Honour, of as charming, sweet Disposition as any Woman in England.

When I saw my Neighbour next, he went with me to his Friend, who asked me how I liked the Lady; As the Lady could not be disliked, I found Fault with her Fortune; He then asked me seriously if that was my only Objection to which I made no Answer, so this Affair ended.

He knew Betty could not then bear it, he added on a note of regret, yet he was obliged to act the farce, lest he should cause his grandmother vast uneasiness for she was bound to hear of their neighbour's offer.

Next there was a scare that a child might be on the way. Tom said Betty told him of it one night in bed at Pinkney and asked him what she should do. It was a shock and playing for time he launched into an obscure discourse (recounting it word by word) on the morals and customs of other countries.

Then we discoursed of other Affairs and I left her and went to my own Bed; and before I got to sleep she came to me, was as cold as a Stone and told me she was frightened out of her Wits, for that she had heard some of the Men-servants go downstairs just as she came out of her own Chamber Door; therefore she durst not go either backward or forward, but had stood in the Cold more than half-an-hour, yet was determined to come to speak to me again because she was to go to Bath on the Morrow with you [Gervase] where she was to stay some Time.

She told me she could make neither head nor tail of what I had said to her; she knew it was a Woman's Duty to obey her Husband; that therefore I should determine and she would do what I pleased any Time before the child was quick; and engaged me to come to Bath on a certain Day before which it should be certain, and would do what I thought proper. She stayed with me till it was light and then left me.

I went to Bath on the Day appointed and though she stayed at Home with me the whole Evening, did not go to the Rooms, yet not a single syllable past between either of us relating to this Affair.

I was to go Home the next Morning pretty early but she insisted on seeing me in her own Chamber before she was up, to take Leave of me; Here she told me she was not with Child.

I answered I was glad of it. You [Gervase] was then in Bed in the adjoining Chamber, therefore I stayed not a Minute with her, took my Leave and went Home.

This intimate account was given because one of the charges framed against him was procuring an abortion. Betty flatly contradicted him, declaring that all that was said on the subject passed in the garden; he had talked at length about the inconveniences attending a discovery and had pointed out a shrub called Savin, telling her that boiled in milk which he would prepare for her, it would prevent their ruin.

It sounds improbable but she goes on:

> I urged the just Reason there was for my Reproaches, having all along feared what I now believed; for had he consulted my Ease and Happiness and not altogether his own present Gratification, it had not happened, being always pressed by me to live apart till he could own me his Wife; but since he had not complied, he must now suffer the Misfortunes attending a Publication of our Marriage, for I would directly acquaint my Grandmother with it.

Her cousin begged her not to tell till there was an absolute necessity.

Again he was badly shaken and realized the danger of drifting. His devoted grandmother had not been propitiated and showed no sign of departing this life, so if he was to marry with her blessing he had better take action forthwith.

At this stage the head of Mrs Cresswell's family, her nephew the 2nd Lord Ducie of Moreton again began to interest himself in the future of his young relative. He was a model and progressive land-owner whose estate at Tortworth lay between Bristol and Gloucester on the western side of the county, near Berkeley Castle; and in fact he stood godfather and gave his name to Moreton Berkeley, the fifth, but first legitimate, son of the 5th Earl of Berkeley, and his Countess, Mary Cole, a much publicized matrimonial tangle of the future.

Lord Ducie knew of a plain little Gloucestershire heiress for whom her family sought a suitable husband and broached the subject. It appeared to Thomas Cresswell as a possible solution —a plain, sensible wife of fortune should not arouse Betty's jealousy and when she and his grandmother no longer shared his home, his absence and her pride would enable her to overcome her passion. His own sentiments for the opposite sex were practical, not romantic.

And that is how it might have worked out and they would

Lancelot Lee being presented to his Mother on the attainment of his majority aged 17.

Painted by Highmore in 1735.

Thomas Estcourt Cresswell
D.L., M.P., *1712–88*
(in middle age).
M.P. Wootton Bassett 1754–74.

Mrs Thomas Estcourt Cresswell
(Anne Warneford) in middle age.
1717–91.

'. . . a religious, virtuous woman . . . yet her tongue, her provoking and constantly employed tongue . . .'

never have been known to posterity; but although he could always manage Betty he reckoned without Lancelot Lee, who never so much as crossed his mind.

He went back to Bath to fetch Betty home so that they could visit Mrs S . . . whom they had met at Cheltenham with her husband the Honourable Mr S . . . She was to be the intermediary for the proposal of marriage between him and Miss Warneford of Bibury, but he did not want it done while brother Gervase was at Pinkney so they contrived an errand to send him to London. Evidently fortunes were discussed, Miss Warneford's being £30,000, for Betty declared how happy she could be with £5,000 'for then she could live as she desired to do, let what Accident soever happen to her Friends or Relations, but that she would never marry any other Man (but her cousin) no, not even was he to die'.

Long after those days many a girl longed with equal fervour for financial independence, but it was more than two centuries before it came.

Betty had £100 a year 'Interest Money on her Fortune' paid by her brother and Tom said he promised her another £100 if she would help him in what he was about. Asked what it was he told her he had thoughts of marrying Miss Warneford, 'he knew she could bear it' because during the summer she had had two offers of marriage which she had tried to keep secret from him and had only told him when she was certain he had heard of them already from other people 'and she had herself partly refused them, they not being advantageous ones, which had either of them been, she would not have done'. Betty who could also be tart described the visit to Mrs S . . . which was not a success.

> . . . after my Brother was gone he told me that Lord Ducie had proposed Miss Warneford, whom he had thought it prudent to see at Bibury Church because a declared Dislike for her Person would account for his Refusal. We owe' said he 'a Visit to Mrs S . . . and will go to-morrow. Our Discourse will turn on Miss Warneford; she is her Relation and I will say so much against her Person that when the Proposal is made her Mother shall refuse it, concluding me desirous of the Fortune only and Lord Ducie and my Grandmother can in no way blame me.' We went: And upstairs Mrs S . . . told me she had heard Mr Cresswell would be her Relation

by marrying her Cousin Warneford which she thought 'would do very well'.

What passed on my side I have really forgot; it could not be much for we were not absent above five Minutes. Certain that the Proposal must come to Nothing, I was indifferent.

To give him the Opportunity of talking as he had promised, I said, 'Mrs S . . .e had heard you will be her Relation'; She answered Miss Warneford is an agreeable young lady indeed; Mr Cresswell it will do very well'. 'I am not at all enamoured of her Person' replied he, 'She is very much marked with the Smallpox, has red Hair and is so low she will almost come under the Title of a Dwarf'. I said laughing 'Really you give an odd Description of the Lady you are going to court!' Mrs S . . .e praised her much, her Temper, the Goodness of her Features, her just Proportion, and would by no means allow her of the Dwarf-kind, he sneering all the Time. She ended every Commendation with 'Indeed Mr Cresswell, I think it will do very well'.

What she did is a Secret to me; but in a very little Time he told me our Conversation had succeeded, Mrs Warneford having refused him and 'Thank God it was over without his being obliged to act the Farce any longer.'

The Warneford courtship had several ups and downs described in detail by Tom Cresswell but not disclosed to Betty, for whom the next year drifted quietly along, although her family wanted her to marry.

My Brother often pressed me but my constant Answer was 'I shall not change my Condition'. Since my Marriage I avoided the Expression of designing to live single. I never once in my Life absolutely denied my Engagement or Marriage, but rather confirmed the Suspicion. Once particularly, dining at Malmesbury with a Sister of Mr Gore's, he in Company, they all, he (Mr Gore) excepted, wished me Joy: I blushed extremely and greatly confused asked if he sent for Mr Cresswell to London to marry me!

Telling Mr Cresswell what had passed he replied very surlily 'Why had you not told all; This will come to my Grand-mother's ears and she will no longer stay at Pinkney. What will become of us?

I was extremely frighted and ever after on the same Occasion turned the Discourse or was silent.

Towards the end of 1743 Tom Cresswell's father died. This improved his position if not his finances and then for poor Betty, the Sword of Damocles fell.

Early in 1744 'Tommy' got married.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Marriage

MRS WARNEFORD HAD trouble with her daughter who would have liked to choose her own future, but her mother was as determined as was old Mrs Cresswell on having her own way.

The marriage proposals were reopened by her man of business, an unpleasant fellow who lived at Filkins, not far from Bibury.

About a year after being refused Tom Cresswell received a message from his steward, a farmer at Sherston name Lea, who would have known the Pinkney estate was still encumbered.

Lea was sure that if he would apply to A. Ready Esq. an attorney, he would 'help him to Miss Warneford'. Asked why he was sure, he said because he never undertook anything in his lifetime but he brought it to pass. Cresswell desired him to leave of his idle prating and state what authority he had, to which he replied a 'letter', and Cresswell then agreed to go with him and have a talk with Ready.

> [Ready] entertained me with such sort of Discourse, telling me that he himself had married three wives, his last a Lady of £30,000 Fortune; that he could strangely and surprisingly influence the Affections of Women; that he would venture his Life on it, if I would be entirely and absolutely guided by him, I should marry Miss Warneford, whose Fortune was £8,000; some few odd hundred Pounds in Money; Bibury estate after her Mother's Death, which would sell for Ten Thousand; in the meantime an Annuity of £300 per annum; that she had a maiden Aunt that lived with her and her Mother that was likewise worth Ten Thousand Pounds and was as fond of her as it was possible for any Mother to be of a Daughter; that as she had refused several advantageous Matches when she was young, there was no Likelihood of her marrying now, and as she had no other near Relation, no Doubt of it, she would leave Miss Warneford her whole Fortune; But as it would not be reasonable I

must not expect to confine her to it; And to his certain Knowledge Mrs Warneford was worth in Money etc Three or Four Thousand Pounds, consequently Miss Warneford might be justly called a Thirty Thousand Pound Fortune, which was in his Power to give me and thereby make my Circumstances compleately easy.

I told him that about a year before I had by Mrs S... made Proposals and been refused. He told me there was a great Difference in the People who did these Things.

I told him she was a Lady of Honour and a Relation of the Family; to which he replied he was sure he could do it, but that the first Offer must come from me.

I fancying that he talked with Authority, told him that I would be guided by him and accordingly left a Letter with him for Mrs Warneford.

He told me that he had an excellent Knack at the Writing of Letters and that he would furnish me before I left him with two, one for the Mother and one for the Daughter, which he would advise me to copy and send to them by a Servant, together with a Present of a Haunch of Venison.

I obeyed his Commands and received an Answer from Mrs Warneford but none from her Daughter; she told me that Captain S...e was then with her, that as he was an Acquaintance of mine I might on a Day he mentioned call on him, and see her Daughter, which I accordingly did.

After Dinner he went out into the Garden and came and tapped on the Window, upon which I went to him and began talking freely about the Affair.

He asked me how I liked Miss Warneford; I told him I was not at all enamoured of her Person, but that signified not much for the Persons of Women were very indifferent to me provided they were sensible and good-natured and that I would not choose a Companion for Life that wanted either of these Qualifications on any Consideration in the World.

He told me that it was every Man's Business to judge for himself; and though he had often been in Company with Miss Warneford, he knew her but very little, for she was, as I saw, a very reserved young Lady; but as he had been informed she wanted neither of these Qualifications.

He asked me whether it would not be better for me to have Ten Thousand Pounds and to be entirely out of Debt and assured me to his Knowledge there was Money enough in the Family to do it, but he was not commissioned to tell me I should have it.

Here we parted and he told me to go to Mrs Warneford who was waiting in the Drawing Room.

I found her with the Particulars of my Estate in her Hands; and she told me that if my Estate answered to those Particulars, and her

Daughter and I liked one another, she had no Objection to our Marrying; But I must not come there any more until that was examined into; and then I had free Liberty to come whenever I pleased; That I must excuse her for examining strictly into it.

I told her as what I had given her was absolutely true and just, the more strictly she enquired into it, the more pleasing it would be to me, as it would authorise me strictly to examine into her Daughter's Circumstances.

She made Excuses for not asking me to stay all Night, told me to go into the Hall to Mr S... and after a short Time to walk with him in the Garden, where I should find her Daughter, her Sister and Self, then walk together for some Time, take my Leave and go Home, which accordingly I did.

After some short Time, Mr Ready and a Tenant of Mrs Warneford's came to Pinkney, sent for Lea, their Business being, as they told me, to examine whether my Estate answered to the Particulars or not.

I told them they had free Liberty to examine into it; that they would find I had not spoke to one single Tenant concerning it; desired to be excused from going with them, but would give them a written Order to produce their last Receipts.

This they thought a needless Trouble; Lea, who had received the Rents of this Estate Fourteen Years, having assured Mr Ready upon his Honour that he knew the Particulars to be true.

This Night at Supper, your Sister, knowing the Business that these Men came upon, appeared very uneasy, which Mr Ready taking Notice of, told her she looked as though she had lost her Love; which he repeated to her again after Supper and by that and several other ill-natured Jests, forced her to go Upstairs that Night sooner than otherwise she designed.

What an unpleasing, not to say obnoxious impression Mr Ready has left on posterity. Betty called him an impertinent fellow with a high opinion of himself and expected their mission to fail, because her cousin had said that, having heard of his father's death they perhaps thought his Fortune enlarged and finding it otherwise would refuse as before, 'else they are in a great Hurry to marry the Daughter'. And there he hit the nail on the head.

A pang of pity can be felt for the poor little Warneford, by this time twenty-six. How different would have been her lot had she been the longed-for son instead of a plain little girl who grew up full of nerves and complexities. Nevertheless she triumphed in the end.

Betty declared that her cousin calmed her over his matrimonial transactions and quoted him as saying 'Indeed Betty, were I not married to you and quite free from Engagements to any of your Sex, I could not marry her; there never was a Creature so immensely ugly'. This put her into pretty good spirits, thinking she would have no more trouble, when to her very great surprise the men arrived. She soon found out their business and going directly to her room, cried most violently. Her grandmother came and seemed amazed to find her in tears; said there was company below and desired her to go down, which she refused, saying she was in too great affliction for company. Mrs Cresswell would hear no more and 'as usual sent for her Grandson'. He severely condemned her behaviour, protesting that this very journey of Ready's would end the proposal, but that was not 'satisfactory'. She told him that if she went down Ready should certainly know she was his wife; if not and her grandmother came again, she should by force hear her.

He flew 'into a most terrible Passion' such as she had never seen before, declaring she was bent on his ruin, for his creditors now in expectation of a fortune by marriage would be patient, but the moment that hope was cut off, what money was owing would be directly called for; and where was there a possibility of raising it? Were their grandmother dead a large sum might be raised on Sidbury. . . . He raged on and finished:

> if you do tell it will convince me that I have neither your Love nor your Esteem. I will allow you a separate Maintenance, but by God, I will never see you more.

His anger terrified her to death. His threats and dread of the misfortunes attending her declaration made her a very miserable woman and frightened her into silence. . . .

> He had not then shown himself the Villain, but would (justly in outward appearance) have been esteemed a worthy, honest man. . . .

She dried her tears, took a large quantity of drops and went down to supper, but could not raise her spirits, either to eat or talk. Mr Ready's jest cut her to the heart and she left the room without reply, feeling sure that he must see his errand was the cause of her sorrow, hoping that he would, and not doubting

but as a friend of Mrs Warneford he would tell her her grief —which in point of fact he did.

Betty hoped against hope that nothing would happen, though Tommy's visits to Bibury caused her great uneasiness, a word much used in her vocabulary, but after his fiery outburst she hardly dared murmur when he went to and fro. She begged him to break off all the visits to Bibury lest a continuance should gain the lady's affection, but 'Don't fear that', said he, 'I never speak with her, my Conversation is all with the Mother; the young one hates me, will never drink to me at Table, or bow when I drink to her; and will I daresay be as glad as either of us when it is over, which shall be the next visit. We have differed about the Shropshire Estate being settled; I absolutely refused it and they will not comply without; Grannie knows Nothing of this and to deceive her I shall at setting out say I shall be married before my Return.'

Betty was much criticized for her complicity in the marriage which cut her to the quick, it being the thing she had most dreaded. At first she denied all knowledge of it, but so many people were scornful that in her book, written some five years later, she was at pains to justify herself, emphasizing her protests and her belief the proposals would fail. There can be no doubt she was kept as unaware as possible to avoid scenes, but she knew her marriage was not legally valid and ignored it because it was her heart's desire; whereas her cousin believed she would accept with resignation a *fait accompli* and bow to the inevitable.

At last the blow fell. Betty described the scene:

> He had been gone but a few Days when one Evening my Grandmother's Maid, running hastily into the Parlour where we were, (she walking and I mending a Morning Gown of his,) said—'Some Men riding through Bibury that Morning had seen Mr Cresswell and Miss Warneford coming out of Church'.
>
> Nothing in Nature can ever give me a greater Shock. My Thoughts are not within my Power of Description. I threw the Gown from me and ran to my Chamber. I flung myself upon my Bed where I cried without ceasing full three Hours.
>
> I had Ten Thousand different Resolutions but knew not which to follow—I will go directly to Bibury and claim my Husband—How shall I get thither unless my Grandmother will give me Leave—

'Good God' I cried 'if he is married what signifies any Thing that I do!'

She caught at a gleam of hope that the report was false.

It is clear that one and all knew of Betty's infatuation for her cousin and that more than one suspected a love affair.

The secret marriage was the only actual secret which might never have been divulged, had it not been for Lancelot Lee, still absent from the scene.

But to return to Tom Cresswell's more prosaic account and the scene of Mr Ready's ill-natured jesting.

The next morning, saying they must do something, they rode out to view the estate and to see some newly planted young hedges, came home to dinner and said they liked it all very well. They drank all that afternoon. Next morning to make it look as though he had done something, Ready made a few trifling alterations in the particulars, for Mrs Warneford's benefit and later sent word they had been approved.

Next came a coach accident on Burford Downs, in which one overturned and Miss Warneford was very much bruised and cut, so her prospective husband went to see how she did. There was a good deal of company at Bibury and he said he 'did not behave in the least particular to Miss Warneford', stayed four or five days and came home again, but was much put out at being told by a neighbouring gentleman that Parson Warneford had publicly given out at Burford Races that her father's will did not entitle Miss Warneford to the inheritance of Bibury Estate; so the next time he went to Bibury he told Mrs Warneford, with whom he always seemed to be on comfortable terms.

She gave him a copy of her husband's will and the opinion of the Lord Chancellor and several other eminent lawyers, who were entirely in her favour; told him to carry them home, examine them carefully and do nothing rashly.

He showed them to his neighbour and they both came to the conclusion that all was well and that:

> the Parson spread the Report only to prevent Miss Warneford's marrying, and himself from paying her an Annuity of Three Hundred Pounds per Annum, which her Father by his Will had gave her for her Mother's Life, and charged it upon an Estate he had gave him (the Parson) of about £2,000 per Annum, who was a very distant Relation at all of Mr Warneford.

Cresswell recorded his complaint:

> This Will was so wretchedly drawn that according to the Law Construction of the Words, he had not in Truth gave anything to the Parson; yet the Lord Chancellor, as he could not suppose that a Man could sign, seal and publish a Paper which he called his Will and mean Nothing by it, in his Equity and Justice gave the Estate to the Parson; and I hope this present Chancellor will upon the same Principle, give the Inheritance of Bibury to my Wife, for her Father as certainly meant the one as the other.
>
> Yet this unjust Parson disputes it with her, though in his Conscience he knows his Benefactor designed it for her; for he cannot suppose he designed robbing his innocent Daughter of her own Family Inheritance only to enrich a Name which such an Action would render infamous.

Satisfied that all would be well, he proceeded with the courtship expecting that 'One Day or another Mrs Warneford would generously offer the Two Thousand Pounds Mr S . . . had hinted at', but hearing nothing of it, as he was walking with her alone, one day, he mentioned it to her.

She explained that if he married her daughter and had a family, undoubtedly everything she possessed would go to them, but she could not afford to part with so much money at present, because should Bibury estate fall in hand she would not have enough money to stock it. Tom Cresswell then told her he felt sure her daughter's fortune would not be paid over in time for him to pay off the mortgage of £8,000 on Pinkney, to which she replied: 'Shall I take the Thorn out of your Foot and put it in my own?'

He told her he didn't desire it but as he thought the securities for her daughter's money were good, if she had ready money by her, it would not inconvenience her.

Although they were good, said she, it might occasion great trouble and law-suits to recover the money and he was better able to go through with it, but finally she said if the money was not paid over to him in time, she would lend him what he needed.

They parted, he to continue his courtship, and on desiring an opportunity of talking to Miss Warneford alone, one was granted him for half-an-hour, 'which sufficed', for she promised to marry him.

Next he desired opportunities for becoming better acquainted, for although every day in company he attempted to discourse on all sorts of subjects he could never get her to talk.

Mrs Warneford promised he should see her alone the next day, and he 'happened' to kiss her. She got up in great wrath, left the room and protested she would never again be alone in his company till she was married. When he told Mrs Warneford she replied: 'You know her now as well as ever you will know her, do what you will.'

Either he accepted the challenge or was entirely indifferent for his narrative states: 'I continued on and we agreed to be married.'

But there were more hitches. Mr Ready had been ordered to make the marriage articles and Tom Cresswell went to see him and them, and found to his disgust that Mr Warneford's will was indeed full of anomalies and was much out of humour for having depended on his own and a country gentleman's opinion on so important a point. Yet as Mrs Warneford had never actually deceived him he decided to proceed, though with the private reservation that should a fair and justifiable cause arise, he would have done with them.

Accordingly he objected to certain lands being reserved to Mrs Warneford, although they had not been exempted in the Particular of Bibury submitted to him. To this Mrs Warneford replied that if he insisted, she would give them up, but would take it very unkind of him as she had bought them with her own money and had no design to leave anything away from her daughter and her family; with which answer, as the affair was trifling, he was forced to be satisfied.

The next objection was to a reserve, enabling his wife after his death, should she have no issue, to give Bibury to whom she pleased and he wrote:

> Here all the Company fell upon me, asking if it was not in the Power of any Husband that lived well with his Wife, in any one fond Hour to prevail with her to do what he pleased; particularly such a one as Miss Warneford who had no near Relations; that it would be ill-judged in me to put it out of my Wife's Power to make me a Compliment. As this was, I thought, sound Reason, I acquiest.
>
> The Articles were finished and signed; a Copy of them I brought

Home and showed your Sister, and as Sidbury Estate was not by them settled on my Wife and her Issue she appeared perfectly satisfied.

'Consoled' would perhaps have been a better word. The discussions illustrate the lack of banking facilities and the position of women before the passing of the Married Woman's Property Act a century later.

Mrs Warneford, elder daughter and co-heiress with her sister of Henry Sackville of Bibury, through the involved wording in her husband's will was in danger of her whole inheritance passing to a Warneford with not a drop of Sackville blood in his veins.

Her only security for Bibury lay in a marriage with issue for her only surviving child.

The marriage took place in the spring of 1744 and by 1747 two children had been born and both the Bibury and the Pinkney succession was assured.

Betty flatly denied that she saw the articles, which could be the literal truth for the only estate that interested her was Sidbury and undoubtedly there was an understanding between the cousins that it should come to her for life.

In her reply she described an angry scene:

Determined to tell my wretched Situation I got up to leave the Room, but he forcibly stopped me. He desired me to calm myself, for I should hear what he had to say and then might act as I pleased. It will plainly appear that I was compelled to do as he pleased. 'You are,' says he, 'determined to tell the whole World that you are my Wife—Tho' it is in mine, it is not in your Power to prove this; and by G-d I will deny it ; the World will then think you my Mistress. But be silent and I will never trouble you more; Live with my Grandmother, where I will never come, or in any way molest you. As Miss Scrope you will be respected. At her Death you shall enjoy the Shropshire Estate left you in my Will (which he then gave me). That you know was your designed Settlement and there is an equivalent during her Life.' Here he pulled a Paper out of his Pocket and offered me; I snatched it and threw it in his Face, saying 'As he had disposed of himself so might he of his Money, for I wanted neither.'

My Passion had no Effect, he went on like a calm Villain—'With the Shropshire Estate you may marry or live single; but I hope Time and your Duty, if this Woman should die, will induce you to forgive this injury. Tho' for a Time we live apart, I shall, if so happy to

bury her (Miss Warneford was considered delicate and would perhaps not survive childbirth) use all possible Means to gain you for my second Wife. You really are my first; but so circumstanced I cannot, or will (not) own you. If you do, you know the Consequence.'

I did not quit my Resolution of telling my Misfortunes, certain that my Innocence would appear if he did deny our Marriage. But his repeated Threats if I did and Promises of never disturbing me if I did not, induced me to Secrecy.

We then get some domestic details. Tom Cresswell wrote that he 'employed' Betty to buy him some wedding shirts and these were finer and better than any he had before; also that in compliance with some foolish superstition of hers, he changed the intended colour of the lining of his coat from green to red. She knew every detail of his marriage transactions because their affair continued throughout this time and they were discussed in bed.

Betty, horrified at this disclosure, was ashamed to own even the reading of such an infamous account, but gave a spirited reply to the matter of shirts and coats, 'which Decency permitted her to take Notice of'.

He used to buy them of the East India People ready-made and for some Two Years had been disappointed; Since our first Engagement when we were together I bought Holland and Cambric and my Maid used to wrist and neck-band these Shirts . . . his Stock which commonly amounted to four, five and even six dozen, was now reduced to eight Shirts, so worn they were with Difficulty mended.

I spoke to the Milliner above a Year before about some Calico for that Purpose. Some Time after, seeing a Piece of I think Six Shillings and Sixpence a yard and knowing how greatly Mr Cresswell wanted Shirts, I showed it him at Pinkney.

He said it was not so fine or good as his own and if Mr William Moreton could get any he would not have it, but if not, he would. I believe his Friend wrote Word he could not get any for he ordered me to buy that . . .

When Mr Cresswell's Mourning for his Father was out, he went one Visit to Bibury in an old laced Coat so little it would not button. Before the next Journey he bought a common Stuff Coat, of a Country Tailor; it was to be lined with Shag. Patterns were brought and my Opinion publickly asked. I thought red suited the Stuff which had that cast, better than the green and was more proper for the Season.

But of course, she added, she did not know these things were for his wedding.

The marriage was to have taken place early in the year, but first Miss Warneford was indisposed and then Lent approached and Cresswell was becoming more and more faint-hearted:

> I had only wanted a justifiable Reason to break off ever since my Conversation with Mr Ready at Filkins . . . and your Sister pressing me to know the last Night I ever laid at Pinkney before I was married, whether I should be married or no the next Time I went, I told her it depended entirely on Miss Warneford's Health. She said 'if you are not married then, you will be another Time'. I replied that many Things happen between the Cup and the Lip, which was the only Hint I ever gave her from the Beginning to the Ending of the Courtship, that I ever thought there was so much as a Possibility of it coming to Nothing.

Mrs Warneford was taking no risks. The couple were married before Lent, lest anything during that season should arise to prevent it.

The marriage was doomed to failure before it began and Anne Warneford gave the reason. When the future scandal broke, the publicity and the mortifying references to her own person were more than she could bear and she published an article in the *British Magazine*.

The pity of it was that previously she had been so inarticulate, with none of her mother's flair for frank discussion. She might have touched her husband's compassion for he declared that he meant to make her a good husband, never doubting that Betty's pride and virtue would enable her to overcome her passion when absent from him; and he declared also that he only fell in love with Betty when he became unhappy with his wife and realized what he had lost.

They quarrelled very soon because he did not go to church with her twice, the first Sunday after their marriage.

Anne Cresswell's letter was published in 1747 under the heading 'On the Unmerited Distresses of Women who marry unhappily. A Memorable Instance of them in the Story of a very unhappy Lady, whose Name has been of late too freely mentioned in some Publick Papers, in a Letter from herself to the Author of the British Magazine.'

> Sir
>
> After my unworthy Enemies have taken their own Methods of publishing their own Infamy to the World, and of reflecting too

harshly on my unhappy Part in their Story, permit me to reply to you, who seem proud to call yourself the Friend of the Distressed, and by your Means to free my Character in the Minds of those who do not know me, of the Aspersions the Author of my Unhappiness has thrown on me.

Our unfortunate Story has been in the Mouths of all the World now for some Months; but give me Leave to say it has yet been very imperfectly told.

All who have related it have indeed been equally able to give it in its true Light, but powerful partiality has concealed too much, at least of what regards my Share in it, and I have been much too rudely calumnised.

'Tis enough for me to be unhappy, let me not, Sir, be slandered too: But take from my own wretched Hand that part of the Relation which Self-Interest made the Rest conceal.

Many Years since when I was young—(writing in 1747 she was 30 and lived to be 74)—and not too disagreeable in my Person and far from despicable in my Fortune, Mr Cresswell was proposed to me as a Husband.

Let me confess my Frailty to you: I had before too deeply engaged my own Heart to think of a second Choice without Horror.

A young Gentleman who to me appeared more amiable than the Rest of his Sex in all Things, but in Nothing so much as in his Virtues, had begged my Permission to solicit my Mother for me:

He was a Clergyman, a Person of great Expectations, tho' then of no great Fortune, and is now much my Superior as I then was his.

I had long in secret admired him and when he made his Application to me, his Modesty, his Aspect, his Submission and his disinterested as well as tender Behaviour, conquered my Heart at once.

My Mother unhappily for me refused him, having heard of this unhappy Man to whom I was afterwards bound and he having the Shadow of a large Fortune, for alas! it was no more.

I had not been educated in the Principles of Vice and Disobedience and knew not how to contradict a Parent:

My Lover, my honest, disinterested Lover, joined also in requesting me, since he could not have a Parent's Blessing with me, to pardon and forget him.

I promised and obeyed and made myself a Wretch.

I will not say I never thought of him afterwards, but this I can solemnly affirm, I never saw, nay, I never wished to see him afterwards.

In Country Places everybody knows the Secrets of every Family. I was soon informed of my new Lover's Engagements with his unhappy Relation. I told my Mother what I had learned, conjured her as I had given up one Lover at her Command, to give me Leave to

decline another with whom I could never be happy, and who could indeed never be happy with me. I pleaded however in vain.

What Methods he had taken I know not, but my wrong-judging Parent was irrevocably bent on the Match.

Unsuccessful with her I next applied to him, begging him to decline his Intent: I told him freely what I knew of his prior Engagement and entreated him not to make me Accessory to the Destruction of one whom he ought to love tenderly.

Alas! How little did he deserve this from me. I told him I saw too plainly that it was my Fortune, not me that he courted and warned him in the most pathetic Terms of the Misery that must attend the marrying one he could not love, while under such binding Obligation to one he did.

Surely there is no Curse to a young Creature so great as that of having a handsome Fortune!

I pleaded here as vainly as to my Mother. I know Mr Cresswell would have given up my Person for a very little Asking, but my Fortune was too delicious a Bait.

I urged this frequently, nay, every Time I saw him, but ever in vain. He pressed, my Parent commanded and I consented, tho' with much Reluctance, as if I could have foreseen what was to be the Consequence.

I made myself a Wretch.

When the Ceremony was over, all was done that my new Spouse required. Let me proclaim him as he is, he could not hide his Baseness even for the Wedding Day; a few Hours showed me I had linked myself for Life to one whose only Wish must be the Period of that Life, that he might give to Another the spoils of my Destruction.

I was but young in Sorrow yet; But Reason dictated to me that though it was a hopeless Attempt, my only Prospect of future Peace must be by endeavouring to make myself as agreeable to my Husband, as he found my Rival.

Just Heaven knows with how true a Zeal I attempted this. I knew him hasty, intemperate, and impatient of the slightest Trouble. I had no Will, no Vice to contradict him; I gave him no Offence, no Pain, no Trouble.

I would not suffer him to stand in the Cold to lead me from my Coach, but us'd a Servant's Arm to help me. What will not Guilt and Oppression turn to its own Purpose. This studied Humility, this careful Assiduity, not to give my Lord and Master Trouble, have been made a Reproach to me ever since, and I have been censured for my Care as if the Effect of a sullen Temper and Aversion.

I am accused of being morose. I have been melancholy, heavily so indeed and I have had heavy Cause for it; and as I do not pretend

to more than Human Patience, surely under my Provocations it might have been pardonable had I sometimes given way to a hard Reflection; but I call my own Misery to witness that in all these Temptations, in all these agonising Trials, I have said Nothing to this worst of Husbands but what the best might have heard without Offence.

Whole Weeks would my cruel Spouse be from me without a Cause, without a Pretext and when he returned Tears were my only Reproaches. With these I wetted my Pillow in his Absence and these I could not wholly command away, even when he returned.

He never deigned to speak to me, our Meetings were all Silence; a churlish Guilt on his Part, a Grief too great for Words on mine; and when my Tears and smothered Sighs disturbed his Repose, he would too often and as he has gloried in confessing, drench me with a colder Flood of Water.

The letter continues to the same refrain and ends on the same note of unmerited wretchedness and misery. But to return to her husband's narrative: After his marriage he always referred to Mrs Warneford and her sister as 'my Mother and Aunt'.

Some little Time after I was married, my Mother, Aunt, Wife and Self went from Bibury to London; on the Road thither my Wife first began to behave herself towards me in an odd, shy, unaccountable Manner, which at last proceeded to such a Height that she would not suffer me even so much as to take me by the Hand to help her in or out of the Coach, but would call her Mother's Footman to do it; Never would speak to me when I applied to her in Company, nor take any the least Notice of me when I drank to her, though frequently called upon to do it by her Mother and her Aunt; and when I was alone with her would constantly scold me, nothwithstanding anything, except ill-natured Replies and bad Usage, that I could do to prevent it, till she was tired and went to sleep.

This Behaviour of hers made me when in London not behave myself with that Love and Tenderness and Respect that new-married Men usually show towards their Wives. Yet even then I showed as much Fondness for her as ever I had done during our Courtship.

On the Road coming from London, my Mother seriously asked me if I knew any Reason for my Wife's thus behaving herself. I assured her I did not and desired her to talk with her Daughter to see if she could tell her any.

Whether she did or no I cannot possibly say, but the next Day, my Mother advised me to slight her, which I accordingly did, and when I took my Leave of her at Bibury to come to Pinkney, took little or no Notice of her.

To Pinkney I came. After Supper your Sister said she had a Mind to drink a Glass or two of Punch, if I would drink some with her.

I told her I would; then says she, 'You shall help me to make it', to which I agreed.

Whilst we were making the Punch she said to me, 'I will not come to you to Bed tonight'; 'Then I will come to you', said I; She answered 'Do as you please'.

I accordingly went, took her in my Arms and kissed her and was surprised she did not return them with the Warmth she usually did and asked her what was the matter? She said 'You have another Woman'; I reply'd, 'What signifies that', and kissed and talked. In less than a Minute she told me she would come to me the next Night, which she did, and every Night after whilst I stayed at Pinkney except the last, which was a Week longer than I designed, occasioned by this Accident: I desired her not to come to me on such a particular Night, telling her I designed going the Day following to Bibury, yet she came and pretended she would not let me lie with her; but I quickly overcame that Difficulty, told her what my Mother had said about slighting her Daughter; As I found she desired it, I would stay another Week, if she would not come to me the last Night or two I stayed, and she kept her Promise.

When I next went to Bibury, I did not immediately find that my slighting my Wife had produced any good Effect, yet in a few Days I did and we went on tolerably well together.

I, as yet, spent my Time between Bibury and Pinkney in the same Manner as I had done during the Courtship, till I received a large Part of my Wife's Fortune; which, with a Thousand Pounds my Mother and Aunt lent me and Seven Hundred and Fifty Pounds that I borrowed at Bristol, enabled me to pay off the Mortgage of Eight Thousand Pounds that was upon my Estate.

Now, your Grandmother and your Sister went from thence to live at Sidbury and insisted on my going with them; it was with some Difficulty they prevailed on me.

To Sidbury we went. I stayed there about three Weeks, during which Time your Sister and I were perpetually together. She made me promise that I would come again the next Winter and stay there a Month or six Weeks.

It was this Summer that you (Gervase) came to live with my Grandmother, but on what Motive you best can tell; whether to save Money as you yourself told me, or to bear your Sister Company. This I am certain of, that she in her Letters told me that she had done Every Thing that was in her Power, both with you and her Grandmother, to prevent your continual Stay there.

I told her that I thought she was wrong, for you would not only be a very good Companion for her, but be the Means of bringing a great Deal more Company to the House than possibly could come, were you not there. But she said 'It will prevent your Coming and I prefer your Company to that of all the World'.

Betty provides the explanation of Anne Cresswell's change in behaviour: She tells us that while they were still at Pinkney and before the Bibury party's first visit to London, her Grandmother insisted upon her paying her compliments at Bibury, having been told that Mrs Warneford resented her not coming. 'I am an old Woman,' said she, 'and can't visit.' They knew that, but had said her grand-daughter was not an old woman and went in her stead to other places. 'I absolutely refused going' wrote Betty 'till she in great Anger insisted upon my Compliance,' adding, 'What Reason can you have for not going? You had better tell the World you are angry Tommy did not marry you.'

And so she was forced to go, and confessed her behaviour must have caused Mrs Warneford great anxiety, but not that she made Anne Cresswell madly jealous, although, as she puts it, 'they must have perceived her great confusion and concern on seeing the then-called bride. And not wishing Joy, (which she had said she would not) must have appeared very strange to them.' She also announced most unkindly that although in the course of writing her book she had quoted many ill-natured remarks of Mr Cresswell's about his wife, she had suppressed many more shocking.

Her visit was from Saturday till Tuesday, all of which time she was a most miserable and dejected creature. A pretended headache was an excuse for getting early to bed, where no sleep was to be had, but she was free 'from the direct object that caused her pain'.

The morning fixed for her return was very rainy and they all said it was impossible for her to go. She said, 'Impossible to stay' although the weather was very bad indeed. 'My Penance was over and my Release felt too easy to let me return again to the Rack.'

She reached Pinkney extremely wet and cold. It was a long drive of about twenty-five miles through Cirencester, south-west to Malmesbury and Pinkney.

The visit was returned by Mrs Warneford and her sister and it is quite clear that they knew of an affair between the cousins.

The mortgage on Pinkney was paid off at the end of April or in May and it was June 1744 when old Mrs Cresswell with her household moved back to Sidbury.

Betty—understandably infuriated by her cousin's disclosure of what had occurred at Pinkney on the first visit after his marriage—declared he had written indecently to prevent an answer, so ignored his account.

After the move back to Sidbury and the stay of three weeks to settle in his grandmother, Tom Cresswell returned to Bibury to collect his wife and organise her establishment at Pinkney: His mother and aunt accompanied them, but after a short while went home to Bibury, leaving the Cresswells together in their own house and alone for the first time.

They got on tolerably well, having a good deal of company and seldom being alone except at night, yet not so well that he did not heartily repent having married her.

And now, comparing in his own mind the different behaviour of the two women, that the one ever had done all things that were in her power to make him happy, and that the other daily did and said all things that she could to make him unhappy, he first began to love Betty and in his letters told her so, which he said he had never before done, either by word or letter.

In these letters he poured forth his whole soul to her and 'said such things as love can influence a sincere man to say;' and to these letters he received 'as warm and passionate Answers as I believe ever wrote, warmer than I ever read'.

Alas, as a result Betty redoubled her efforts to wreck his marriage and get her own Fleet ceremony proclaimed.

The Cresswells visited Bibury, staying with Mrs Warneford, when next the Burford races were on; then went to one of Anne's relations who treated them with 'great Goodness and Generosity', but whilst there Anne quarrelled with him again, 'for what reason he neither knew nor heard, nor could he so much as guess at', so on their return to Bibury, he left her there after two or three days, going on himself to Pinkney and thence to Sidbury by arrangement with Betty, who had told him that her brother (who had taken up residence with their grandmother) was about to leave for Lincoln.

From Sidbury back to Bibury, where he collected his wife and a young lady, a relation of hers, and returned to Pinkney. It was a restless life, and he complained:

I did not find that my Absence and my having been in Shropshire had wrought any good with my Wife, because she now constantly scolded me whenever I was alone with her;

I therefore determined to see if Jealousy would work any good upon her; therefore I affected before her Face to caress her Relation and to behave with great Civility and Complaisance to her, which my Wife taking Notice of, asked me the Reason of it; I told her it was because she behaved civilly towards me, which if she herself would, I should prefer her to all the World; but she disdaining to do it made us on very ill-terms.

And again he added resentfully:

If I spoke to her before Company sometimes she would answer and sometimes she would not; when I drank to her, as I always did every Meal, she never deigned to look at me nor suffer me to hand her in or out of the Coach, but desired a Footman to do it for her; this she constantly did every Sunday in the Face of the Congregation.

In the spring of 1745 he went on business to London, by which time the birth of the first child was imminent and Mrs Warneford and her sister kept his wife company at Pinkney.

A fit of the gout came on, which detained him in London and caused great offence at home, although he left 'as soon as he was able and sooner than most people would have done, had he regarded his own health, for all the following summer he had the Gout flying about him'.

My Mother was heartily out of Humour with me for my long Stay, though she knew the Reason of it and that I could hardly then hop about.

Presently after this I had a fresh Attack of the Gout and was forced to lie by myself and kept my Bed one Day; my Wife never once offered to come near me nor sent to know how I did.... My Mother and Aunt came again to be with her during her lying-in; I did not in the Interval show any great Love or Tenderness towards her, not having any and I cannot dissemble.

Being heartily tired of my Wife I wrote to your Sister and engaged her to go to live abroad with me; But on my Wife's Recovery and better Behaviour, I desired her to stay till I had another Child.

This first child proved to be the longed-for son and heir, born on 10th May 1745, a day for great rejoicing, but the remark about another child is the only indication of any softening effect on his parents.

That summer the old grandmother had a stroke of the palsy

and all her grandchildren were sent for. Tom Cresswell set out immediately for Sidbury and within a few days Betty arrived and there they lamented their mutual misfortune that he was married, for Betty was 'thoroughly satisfied in her own mind that he should have publicly married her whenever he could have afforded it' and it now looked as though this time had come. But Mrs Cresswell, nearly eighty, recovered, and the next few pages of Betty's book make tedious reading being full of expostulations on her own blameless virtue and her cousin's villainy. Her situation was unenviable and fraught with anxieties, but her arguments become confused, and writing several years later she introduces sinister hints about his having wished his wife would die and for the first time mentions 'Terms' for a settlement between them.

At the time, according to Tom, they parted very good friends, and he agreed to see her again at the beginning of the winter.

This however he was unable to do because he had engaged himself in Lord Berkeley's new raised regiment, thereby causing great offence to his wife.

Betty wanted him to settle things amicably with Mrs Warneford by giving up Pinkney to his son and returning Bibury to his wife, reserving only Sidbury for themselves and any children that might follow; but she added 'he could not bear the Thought of owning himself a Villain, nor I the Infamy of living with him as his Mistress. He was the former but I was not the latter.' She related that about two days before leaving he had shocked her excessively by saying 'Well, Betty, will you live with me without a Discovery?' She said 'No' and he replied 'then I am sure it is only Miss Warneford that prevents you. . . . I dreamed last Night that I stuck my Bayonet into her Breast, which till I waked gave me as much Joy as the News of her Death would.' She answered 'You know the Terms on which you may have me'.

During that winter of 1745 Tom Cresswell had none too happy a time; the first occasion when he left the regiment and came home to see his wife, as soon as he came into the room, she left it, and he saw her no more till supper; and after supper she scolded him until he turned her out of the room; she promised to be quiet if allowed back and was so for five min-

utes, then he had to turn her out again and would not let her in any more that night.

When he went to bed to her she began again and 'it was not in his power to prevent her by anything he could do or say, so she fairly talked till she was tired and went to sleep'.

He returned next morning to Bristol to the great surprise of his commanding officer, who had formerly been a schoolfellow, and had said he could be absent from the regiment as often as he pleased, so it was agreed he should go home every Saturday and return every Tuesday.

Being so ill-used at home he remained away a fortnight, then went to Pinkney again and stayed the allotted time, not because he was better treated but lest his friends should notice.

This pattern of behaviour went on for some time and the consistently chilly reception at home prevented his bringing Colonel Vane or any of the other officers back with him, although they 'even almost desired him'; At last, having nearly 'learned his duty' he asked a month's absence, promising Colonel Vane that if he received any orders for marching and would send an express, he would join the regiment next day.

Accordingly he was granted leave and away he went to Sidbury.

Thirty years previously in the 1715 Stuart rising, Lord Berkeley, Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, had secured Bristol against the Jacobites with several regiments of horse and foot.

In 1745 the danger was not so great, but the Government took no chances. As the crow flies, Bristol is about a dozen miles from Bath and both places about twenty miles from Pinkney, south-west and south respectively, 'a Morning's Ride'.

Thomas Cresswell, despite his family traditions had no interest in the Jacobite cause, which had ruined his father; his Ducie, Moreton and Scrope relations were all Whigs and pro-Government.

He found Betty and Gervase Scrope at Sidbury and declared that Betty had much pressed him to come, promising that if he would be alone with her in her chamber, 'she would with him and cared not what any one either said or thought'; and accordingly they were hours together every day. The first time he was with her alone she told him 'that if he had not come to her, she

would have come to him'. This was no way to solve their problems.

T.E.C.:

> Mr Lee came to Sidbury to visit me and to get my Grandmother and me to assign over to him some Copy-hold Lands, value £50 in his Parish which he and his family told us we had a Right to; though as it would have been attended with some Difficulty to have got possession of them, we had declined being Tenants of his Court.
>
> He came in such Manner as made his Return that Night impracticable; therefore he told his Sister Mollie, who was then at Sidbury, that if he could not have a Bed there he would lie at a Farmer's in the Neighbourhood.
>
> She told this to your Sister and they contrived together that Mollie should quit her Room to him and lie in one of the Maids' Chambers. He stayed three or four days....

This was in February 1746 and from now onwards Mr Lee ordered all their lives.

April 1746 saw the extinction of the Jacobite cause and the newly raised regiments were disbanded.

Prince Charles Edward had landed in the north in July 1745 and his rising culminated in the tragic battle of Culloden in the following April.

There was no plotting in England prior to the Prince's landing and both the tragedy and the glory of the '45 passed most Englishmen by and hardly impinged on their private lives, although the Prince reached Derby.

They were as unaware or as unmoved by Cumberland's hideous excesses after Culloden as they have been in the main by the Mau Mau atrocities in Kenya a couple of centuries later.

At Culloden the flower of Highland manhood was wiped out, a bitter price to pay for a cause; yet men can do no more than lay down their lives in loyalty and that supreme sacrifice has never been forgotten; something of its glory touched men's hearts and minds and there was romance in the story of the fugitive Prince with a huge price on his head, hunted for weeks throughout a grief-stricken, poverty-ridden country, yet never betrayed; and glamour in the story of Flora Macdonald who helped to get him away to safety—and remorse.

The Stuarts were men of straw but their cause aroused and

still arouses passionate feelings. It meant nothing to Tom Cresswell but young Lancelot Lee was a Jacobite and believed in constancy—was not his family motto 'Fide et Constantia'!

He may have had something of a poet in his composition; At all events he saw himself a noble fellow, a knight errant adopting his lady's cause, cost what it might.

That his ardour caused a certain amount of consternation we know from a novelette, published in the following year by 'A Lady of Shropshire'.

She could have been one of Lee's seven sisters, earning a little pin-money and finding self-expression in that age of repression for well-brought up young ladies; for she proffers no criticism at all of Lee and makes Tom Cresswell an unmitigated villain.

Her characters wore fictitious names because as she explained they were all so well known, but she declared her story 'true History'.

Cresswell was Clodio, Lee Amintor, Betty Melissa and Anne Warneford Leonora and she called her book 'Love and Avarice' or 'The Fatal Effects of preferring Wealth to Beauty' . . . 'and the unhappy Consequences the Knowledge of it produced'.

In this she showed perception for affairs were commonplace and it was the publicity that caused the unhappiness and prevented a private settlement.

This *History of a young Gentleman of Fortune* was followed and bound in the same volume with another story 'of equal infamy' of a low-born fellow who under false pretences imposed himself on his master's daughter. She called it *Virtue Triumphant and the Footman hanged.*

Her book began with a tirade against the social state of her world. . . .

> that which pleases best is deemed just, however contrary to the moral Nature of Right and Wrong. Interest is become the governing principle among Men . . . and . . . when a Man or Woman is resolved to indulge their Passions, no other Considerations, human or divine, are suffered to take place.

More than two centuries later, her words are not out-dated.

> . . . The Wiles of Men are infinite; and although a Woman be ever so much upon the Watch, yet it is not impossible she may be surprised.

> . . . Alas! far different is the Conduct of the Generality of our Ladies, especially those who are under no Restraint from Parents or Guardians; They seldom look beyond the Person that presents himself to their Service; if that happens to strike in with their Humour they seek no further, but imagine all his other Qualities are suitable to the Appearance he makes.

And she adjures Amintor and Clodio:

> to agree to bury Things past Remedy in Oblivion and not expose themselves to the further Censure of the World by engaging in expensive Law-suits which will benefit Nobody but the Lawyers.

The Lady of Shropshire was not the only writer. Another book was produced called *Dalinda or the Double Marriage being the Genuine History of a very recent and interesting Adventure.*

This was addressed to 'all the Young and Gay of both Sexes' and began with a quotation:

> 'Tis our own Wisdom moulds our State
> Our Faults or Virtues make our Fate.
>
> Cowley.

Betty was Dalinda, Tom Cresswell Malvolio.

It told the same story but painted in some of the scenes.

Although neither book spared Betty, both authors accepted her fundamental innocence and therefore had to have a villain and for their hero they sublimated Lancelot, taking him at his own valuation.

From *Dalinda*:

> The old Lady (Mrs Cresswell) was extremely fond of Dalinda and as she grew up had her instructed in all polite as well as useful Accomplishements of her Sex and Nothing bestowed on her was in vain. The quickness of her Apprehension made everything her own almost as soon as she was told it. . . .
>
> She was also extremely pretty and of so affable and obliging a Disposition that she became the Delight, not only of her own Kindred but of as many as had any Acquaintance with her; and no one doubted but that she would one Day make a very shining Figure in the World.

When she was about eleven her grandmother 'thought proper she should show herself to her Father' and accordingly sent her up to London with an old relation (Mrs Huggeford) who was a dependant on the family.

Her father's pleasure at finding her so much beyond what could have been expected from a country education was 'not to be expressed'; all her relations in London were equally charmed with her—'never was Girl more caressed, more encouraged'—yet as her father was married again . . . she chose to go back to her grandmother. . . . 'Chearful, easy, happy in herself and pleasing to all about her, did Life glide on. . . .'

Of her infatuation for her cousin 'who had ever been the Darling of the old Lady':

> She loved him without knowing that she did so—thus did she suffer herself to take in whole Draughts of an infectious Passion and became the most passionate of Lovers—while she thought she only possessed the Affection of a Kinswoman, she adored him. . . .
>
> She languished in Desires, the Nature of which she was ignorant of herself, till by degrees she forsook Sports and Avocations. . . .
>
> When he was absent she would sit whole Hours together musing, watching for his Return; forced into Company she was absent-minded, but her Eyes sparkled and she was talkative and gay whenever he was present.
>
> She loved, it is true, with an Excess of Passion, but then she loved with Innocence—Kisses, Embraces, and tender Words were the utmost of her Wishes—her Passion had not the least Tinge of Impurity in it. . . .
>
> Her Grandmother apprehended so violent a Passion in so young a Creature. . . .
>
> It was a long Time before he perceived the Conquest he had made.

And of her cousin's love-making:

> This Behaviour shocked her to the Soul . . . she protested and resisted . . . 'leave me injurious Man'—but he was no sooner gone than she wished his Return. She was in Truth the Slave of Virtue and the Victim of Love.
>
> Her Brother came into the Room and took her Cousin away with him to see a great Cock-Match, then to be fought.

At the reading of the Marriage Service.

'Well,' said she, 'if you will ruin me you must, I cannot live without you.' 'Well—Dalinda, to show you how much I love you, I will humour you in this Respect.'

And on Lancelot:

> He had loved her from her very childhood. Her growing Beauties of Mind and Person gave Promise in Maturity of Everything he could wish for. . . .

'He watched the early Glories of her Eyes
As Men for Daybreak watch the Eastern Skies'.
As soon as he thought her arrived at what he thought a proper Age, he offered her his Heart . . . and was mortified by her Refusal.

A detail is added that he saw and overheard the cousins together in the garden, suffered a grave shock and was disconsolate, and therefore relieved and delighted when he heard later of Tom Cresswell's marriage.

This accounts for his withdrawal from the stage in 1736–37.

It must be remembered that he was a little younger than Betty and only seventeen or eighteen at that time. But the arrogant conceit that made him bide his time with assurance and which is so evident in his letters, may have been the cause of the unfavourable impression he made on old Mrs Cresswell and her friends.

And no doubt at that time they all thought Betty could do better.

Her sister was married to the Earl of Deloraine, a great-grandson of Charles II. Later, when Betty had wrecked her life and was completely under Lancelot Lee's influence, her grandmother did what she could to promote the match.

It was said of Dalinda in the book, that shocked by what she had done she reflected how happy she might have been with Lancelot, whose sister was her dearest friend.

And of Malvolio that he really liked his wife to begin with, but she proved to be 'capricious, difficult, haughty and jealous, with spleen in her composition . . . although not yet four and twenty'.

'Whence comest thou?' asked the Lord of Satan, in the book of Job.

'From going to and fro in the Earth and from walking up and down in it.'

On one of these expeditions Satan undoubtedly espied Lancelot Lee, a young man with plenty of leisure on his hands for mischief, and decided to make full use of him.

CHAPTER SIX

The Break Up

THOMAS ESTCOURT CRESSWELL was jealous and his cousin was only too pleased, hoping thereby to bend him to her will.

Lancelot Lee was also jealous, but he was by nature prudent and conventional and although irresistably attracted to Betty Scrope there was the usual matter of her fortune to be considered.

Who can blame her for playing off the two men against each other, yet nothing could have been more disastrous, for she fanned a flame that got out of control.

She did not love Lee and all her life had vowed never to marry where she did not love, but nonetheless he spelt deliverance from a situation that had become intolerable.

Young Mrs Cresswell's second child was born in 1747 when already her husband was thinking in terms of a separation, but there was small likelihood of divorce; and above all else Betty cherished her reputation. Hence from her point of view the necessity for publishing her secret marriage, that she might declare she had believed it legal and thus exonerate herself.

The only acceptable alternative was a life-tenure of Sidbury on her grandmother's death and independence, and this was what she really craved—a wish echoed through the centuries by many another young woman.

The conduct of most men, we are told, is determined by the prevailing fashion of the society in which each lives.

Cresswell, Lee, and Scrope were all autocratic country gentlemen—independent squires—accustomed to exercise authority and make arbitrary decisions. They loved land and needed money for its development, for in the eighteenth century times were good and squires were little thought of who did not drain and

enclose land, rebuild farm houses, plant trees, enlarge their halls and adorn their grounds. And there was no scarcity of labour.

There is a glimpse of Cresswell planting hedges and of Scrope consulting him about enclosures and there is a pleasant sidelight on Lancelot Lee writing in May 1745 to a relative in far-off Virginia.

He is writing to the Hon. Thomas Lee, President of the Colony, and his letter is mainly about the family. This Thomas Lee was the ancestor of the famous American General Robert E. Lee.

Lancelot concludes:

> It is very extraordinary that any family, considering the great revolutions that have so frequently happened in England, should remain nearly 700 years in the same state which our family has done. The last two or three generations must certainly have been very frugal or they could not have preserved the estate.
>
> Variety of wives and a large number of daughters are a very heavy weight upon land and can only be balanced by very prudent management....
>
> From the first part of this letter you will readily discover me to be a talkative young man, who has not had the cares of a family to compose his mind.
>
> Curiosity has thrown me a good deal abroad in the world, but at present I live in the country entirely taken up with the diversions my gardens and fields afford me and endeavouring to make 'Mohamet's Paradise' by Art which you enjoy by Nature.
>
> Your fruits and shades are indeed delightful. I have tasted them in the Eastern though not in the Western world.... After all give me leave to beg a small favour of you—the following trees are I believe native of Virginia which I have endeavoured to procure seeds of, but have hitherto been unsuccessful—the Virginia Cypress (it grows on wet, marshy land) the scarlet oak, and the paria or scarlet flowering horse chesnut.
>
> The cones of the cypress should be sent entire; the acorns and chesnuts will easily keep so short a voyage. Pardon this trouble, which if I can return with anything this Island affords within my Power, you may fully command.
>
> Your humble servant
> (signed) Lancelot Lee.

Lancelot Lee had increased the acreage of his estate when he came of age. He was a highly eligible young man, having inherited Coton in splendid order.

He told his story to the world in public letters to the Press and confirmed that in 1737 (aged eighteen) he had visited Sidbury intending to propose marriage to Miss Scrope, whom at that time, he believed to be a '£2,000 Fortune', but had concluded the cousins were engaged and had been rebuffed by their grandmother—'which was beyond his comprehension as in Point of Interest he was much her superior and an Equality of Merit would have been hard to find in any other Man'.

He had begun to suspect Cresswell's honesty in 1740 when the family moved to Pinkney because he heard that he paid his addresses to other women, and as his own love for Miss Scrope remained, this gave him hope. However he paid her a call in London in 1742 and again was convinced they were engaged and so was much surprised by the Cresswell marriage.

In 1744 when Betty and her grandmother returned to live at Sidbury, he went to live at Coton and wanted very much to pay them a visit, but chose it should be accidental. Clearly his reception on the previous occasion had rankled.

From such fragile gossamer is the web of fortune spun!

In July 1745 on his way home from Leicestershire he had met Betty on her way to Sidbury, where her grandmother lay in grave danger from her stroke of the palsy, but although he sent to enquire he still paid no visit until the business occasion in February 1746, when he declared that Cresswell's behaviour was morose and surly—'though as that was natural, it surprised him not'.

All his affection for Miss Scrope was now renewed and during the next six months the intimacy between their two families was much increased. Lee said he never thought of marriage as a contract of interest, but love, therefore disregarded the smallness of Miss Scrope's fortune and determined to engage her, 'but not soon'; until from herself he could get more particulars of her cousin's behaviour.

In April Betty went down with measles and really lay in great danger and his extreme anxiety betrayed his affection and everyone saw it plainly; he told Betty 'his design' and she seemed greatly concerned and spoke 'with much good nature' of his constant attachment for so many years, but added that Mr Cresswell was a most egregious villain who had abused her mon-

strously, and although infinitely obliged she could not marry while he lived.

Cresswell was incapable of love, declared Lee, but the world would understand his action. So he went on to confess without shame that he had advised Betty on recovery to correspond with her cousin, keep all his letters, which at a proper season would be of great service to her, and make him suspect, 'by all but an absolute declaration', that she had a regard for himself (Lee). The public letter continued full of abuse for his rival.

Cresswell's narrative confirms that after he had left Sidbury in February 1746 the Coton and Sidbury families were constantly together and he wrote to Scrope, 'until you, Sir, as you told me, were tired of their Company, being vexed at the indecent Liberties Mr Lee used with your Sister; kissing and toying with her before all sorts of Company; being alone with her in her Bedchamber Hours every Day; nay, even when she was in Bed, particularly when she had the Measles'.

Lancelot's sympathetic companionship had had a loosening effect on the barriers of Betty's self-restraint and she had poured forth some of her pent-up emotion, but knew she had been indiscreet; for the narrative states that just before the measles she had written to her cousin to say that if he could not leave the regiment and come to Sidbury, she would go to Pinkney for a month. This might have broken the influence Lee was fast acquiring, but unfortunately Anne Cresswell was about to leave for Bibury, and Cresswell went to Sidbury instead. There he discussed Lee's courtship with Gervase Scrope and found it not to his liking, as so far Mr Lee had not mentioned marriage. Betty, they decided was leading him on, 'making her Court' as they expressed it.

Next, Tom Cresswell, thoroughly jealous, tackled Betty, but she assured him she would never marry Lee. 'Show him then' he told her 'that you don't like him, act by him as you did the last Man that made his Addresses to you and the Affair is over at once.' But she said she could not, though she promised to keep him informed by letter of what was going on.

This provided Lee with his opportunity. From now on he wrote most of her letters for her.

The Cresswell narrative gives a cameo of an evening they spent together at this period.

> Mr Lee one Night, as we were reading and writing of Songs, turned to an old Scotch Song that I had never heard sung or taken Notice of before, neither could I see anything remarkably fine either in the Poetry or the Tune.
>
> It gave an Account of one Douglas going to his Mistress telling her he had killed his Rival, who happened to be better liked by her than himself; saying he should be forced to fly to England and desiring her to accompany him, assuring her that Tweedside was as pleasant as the Banks of the Yarrow; yet she would not go, she was constant and died for Grief.
>
> This Song, Mr Lee, in a very particular Manner, declared his entire Approbation of; forced your Sister, you and me to read over several Times and to consider it.
>
> I told him I saw Nothing remarkable in it but the Constancy, which was in itself ridiculous as the Man was dead; Ay, the Constancy, reply'd he.

From another source we learn that Tom Cresswell quoted Dryden:

> There is no such Thing as Constancy we call,
> Faith ties not Heart, 'tis Inclination all;
> Some Wit deformed or Beauty much decayed
> First Constancy in Love a Virtue made;
> From Friendship they that Landmark did remove
> And falsely placed it on the Bounds of Love.

Also that the men sat up drinking till the night was far advanced.

Lee would have known through his sister's close friendship that Betty had always doted on her cousin and rumours of an affair that had reached Bibury could not have failed to reach Coton Hall and would account for his earlier caution; but had he actually proposed in 1746 he might have been accepted, as Betty's family to whom she was now a great anxiety, might have brought pressure to bear.

She maintained in her book she would never have married him leaving him in ignorance of the truth, and so kept him at arm's length with the mysterious story of being unable to marry while Cresswell lived; and such was her charm or his conceit that he does not seem to have realized that he had failed to inspire love and that she still cared deeply for her cousin, whom

he hated with an increasing virulence, as he publicly made clear, for having got in his way.

He saw himself in the role of constant lover and entered the lists as Betty's champion to procure her damages or 'terms' and to ruin his rival.

Miss Scrope with a dowry of Sidbury Hall would be a rich prize and one well worth striving for. The property marched with Coton, agriculture was booming and all landowners were acquisitive.

The patterns of wrong-doing are automatic and when he and Betty became animated by hatred and a desire for revenge they became in effect blackmailers, though wrapped in self-righteousness and shielded from contact with other points of view they did not realize this aspect of their conduct until too late and it was Betty who suffered most.

But to return to Cresswell's narrative and the conversation about constancy. He wrote to Scrope:

> Next Morning after Breakfast your Sister held forth largely in Praise of Constancy in Love and happening to talk like an experienced Dame occasioned Mr Lee and you to laugh violently.
>
> I smoothed the matter over as well as I could.
>
> Mr Lee, being a little shy, reply'd some Years ago it would have been in the Power of almost any Woman in England to have persuaded him to marry her, but that now he was older and wiser; knew the real and intrinsick Value of Money, therefore could, nor would not, marry any Woman in England without a Fortune.
>
> Your Sister still continuing to talk in praise of Constancy and making it the whole subject of her Discourse whilst I stayed at Sidbury and permitting Mr Lee, although to other Men a remarkable shy Girl, to take what Liberties he pleased with her in Company, and refusing ever to be alone with me whilst he was there, made me fully satisfied that she would marry him if she could.
>
> [The beginning of Lee's plot to fox him was succeeding.]
>
> I therefore the Summer following told you so with great Positiveness; desired you not to send for her, nor to let her know that I was come; Yet you did, unknown to me, send to her that Night to let her know that I was come and she came to Sidbury.
>
> The next Day, being Sunday, she stayed at Home alone with me from Church, talked to me a great deal of the Affair, but told me Nothing more than she had done by Letter. I asked her seriously whether she would marry Mr Lee or not; she answered me 'Not'.
>
> I asked her why she suffered him to use such familiarities; She told me she could not help it; 'How' said I 'not help his being alone

with you two Hours at a Time when you are in Bed? Could you not knock upon the Floor with a Shoe and would not Jenny come up to you and could you not have desired her to sit down?' She told me she did not think of it; I seemed satisfied.

But the next time Betty saw Gervase to his stupefaction she flew into a passion, furious with him for having gossiped with Tom.

On the Monday or Tuesday Mollie Lee left Sidbury where she had been staying for many months and on the Wednesday they all went to Coton, where Cresswell complained: 'Mr Lee says I insulted him, but as I have declared a hundred Times since, so I do now, that I did not mean it as such.'

Lee described the occasion in his public letter, declaring that when he went to Sidbury in July, after Betty had recovered from the measles, Cresswell had tried to break the acquaintance by irritating Scrope against him.

You knew Mr Scrope was a rigid Whig, bitterly averse to those Principles favoured by the Opposition; you expressly told him I was a Jacobite, a Title you were sure would make me odious in his Eyes.... You both came over to Coton with a Design of roasting, I will not say affronting me, though your Behaviour at that Time would justify the Word.

Dinner over and a Health or two gone round, you, without being called upon, drank the King, so did I; (George II) You immediately proposed the Duke, I drank the same; (the Old Pretender, Duke of York) you acted prudently knowing I could not resent this, if I had desired it.... The topick then was the Duty of Marriage, introduced by me on purpose, which you ended with an ill-judged and—to yourself—severe Ridicule on our Saviour, for not performing this Duty, which you said was better executed by St Paul, who though not married, yet kept Mistresses. Could your Spleen keep no Bounds? I spoke not Evil of your King, yet you revile my God....

To this Cresswell made public reply:

'Tis true that I drank King George's Health at your House, but do not remember that I reviled your God (as you express yourself) because he neither married or kept Mistresses. I never took you for either Tory or Jacobite, having whenever we discoursed on Politicks etc declared you thought of those things as I did.

To Betty he wrote:

... for if I did behave foolishly at Coton that could only affect the

People there, of whose good Opinion I daresay you think yourself certain; my Behaviour was nothing more than common and I am sure I have seen such twenty times since; for I cannot live out of Company, therefore I have not been without three days in the whole five weeks since I left you . . . and surely there is no Toast so Proper for an Officer to drink as the King's on his Inauguration Day.

Betty reported a conversation with Lee after this dinner:

Lee: Can you think that a Man pretending to religious or even moral Principles could have talked in this Manner?

Betty: No; for Religion I always feared him unsettled; but in Morality till Years after our Engagement I thought him severely good and am most unfortunate in being deceived.

Lee: Well then for the future repose no Confidence in him. . . . Either you are his Wife or his Mistress, (do not be angry that I speak so grossly) though I cannot tell how to think you are the former, no one Action of your Life can make me suspect that you deserve the other Character. . . . Tell me truly your Misfortunes and I will not only give you my Advice but assist you to put that Advice in practice, with all in my Power.

I love you entirely; and if Time and Patience will possibly gain you, will never while you live think of any other Woman.

Betty: Mr Lee, I thank you for your Advice: When ill I told you that Mr Cresswell had been a monstrous Villain and that in his Life I could not marry: What the Particulars of his Ill-usage are, you must not now know: Yet I cannot bear you to think ill of me: in my Engagement with him I never transgressed any one Point of Virtue.

He has promised me within a Month after his Return to Pinkney, publickly to redress my Injuries. . . .

Cresswell was already negotiating a separation from his wife and hoped within that time to complete it and then to make a clean breast of his affair with Betty to her brothers and to persuade her to live with him, abroad at first if necessary.

The return visit after the dinner-party at Coton was made only by Mollie Lee, who brought a message from her brother and Mrs Bathurst, a sister, holding Betty to a promise to spend a month at Coton on her own, without the chaperonage of her brother; and to her cousin's displeasure she accepted.

Lee after the dinner had promised to wait a month but had added:

The Neighbours have hitherto concluded there was a designed Marriage between us; Should our Acquaintance end upon Mr Cress-

well's Account, your Reputation must inevitably suffer.... Consider the Month cannot too soon begin at the End of which it will be certain whether he means you well or Ill. In that Interval on no account destroy any Letter....

'There was much Company at Coton,' wrote Betty 'I stayed all Night and returned the next Morning home.'

She returned to long conversations with her cousin. Asked whether she designed marrying Mr Lee or not, she replied she did not know whether he would have her or not. Later she said that he did design marrying her to which she had replied that she would never have him. She appeared very uneasy and dissatisfied, saying that all was now over. She was determined to go to Coton and her cousin did not forbid it, but she felt very dismal. Her cousin was unsympathetic.

He told her there was no such thing in nature as the Philosopher's Ass; that nobody need be unhappy that had it in their power to do as they pleased, which she had; and if she preferred marrying of Lee to living with him in any manner that was in their power to do, the month's visit would set all things right again; that if she found Mr Lee would not have her, she should still be welcome to him. He would go and live with her out of England.

She told him she would never go out of England, but if he would live with her in England and say she was his wife, she would publicly live with him.

He explained it was impossible, but that if she would go with him to France 'for some little Time' and write to some friend in England that he had persuaded her of the lawfulness of a man's having two wives and had accordingly married her—to which she had the more readily consented because she knew he lived 'very unhappy' with his first wife—and that she was sure a separation would be for their mutual happiness—and because she had always loved him. She seemingly agreed and promised to go to her sister when the month at Coton was over and put off Mr Lee.

But that night after she had gone upstairs she cried violently and he went to her and told her he would do anything in his power to make her happy and 'easy', but she said she would lose her reputation if she stayed, with him in the house.

As he was going upstairs to bed Gervase Scrope came out of his room to ask what could be the matter, but as usual was put off. He took his responsibilities seriously and later fought a duel for his sister, but was never, ever, in the picture.

Next morning Tom Cresswell went to Betty in her room before she was up, to say he would go away that day and that she had his free consent to marry Mr Lee, then left immediately before she could answer. It was the last thing she wanted.

T.E.C.: At Breakfast she desired me to stay two or three Days longer and assured me that she would never marry Mr Lee, but would live with me in any Manner that I thought proper; yet a Day or two after, talking in the great Parlour of the great Uneasiness and Fears that she was in lest she should have proved with Child when she was at Bath (with her Brother) I repl'd: 'I wish you had proved with Child, which if you had we should now have been both happy': She answered 'I was then frightened out of my Wits and so I should now; I fancied myself so, yet there is Nothing but that can ever make me happy.'

She several Times when I was alone with her desired that I would kiss her and treat her in the same Manner before Company as Mr Lee did, undoubtedly with the Design that Mr Lee should hear of it and desert her; Yet whenever I attempted it she seemed not to approve of it and would the next Time she could speak with me, desire me not to do it.

Yet at one particular Time, being the Night that I returned from Gloucester, to which Place I went to join the Regiment in order to be broke, she forced me to do it.

It was this wavering Disposition of hers, even whilst I was upon the Spot, that made me sure that she would marry Mr Lee as soon as I was gone away, if she could; and always made me with Confidence tell you [Gervase] I was sure of it.

For all this she imposed on me, just at the last before I left her: Three several Times I had at her Desire stayed three Days at a Time longer than I designed, after that Night's Crying; She now desired me to stay a Fortnight and almost insisted on it: I refused her, saying 'At the End of that Fortnight you will ask me to stay another'; She told me she did not know but she might and assured me as soon as the Month's Visit was out she would go to her Sister Deloraine and never think of Mr Lee more.

Poor Betty, a paralysing choice lay before her; Marriage with a man she did not love though his sister was her best friend; or to live openly as the mistress of the one she did, which spelt social ostracism at least as far as her own sex was concerned,

and the sacrifice of the very privileged position she had always enjoyed.

She balked at either and clutched at spinsterhood, but with insufficient means that outlook was also dim.

She continued the struggle for her own solution, craving ultimate possession of Sidbury, but knew in her heart that the month's visit to Coton would prove her point of no return.

Today, two hundred years later, her problems would no longer exist.

Cresswell left Sidbury for Pinkney, whence he wrote her a letter, then went to Bibury for a week to see his wife, then rode home to get Betty's answer, wherein she expressed such uneasiness and dissatisfaction that he wrote to her again, and 'desired her to do those Things that would tend most to her own Ease and Happiness, without much regarding that of Others, for of that she could only guess'.

But Betty's uncertain, yielding disposition was not the type that could come so easily to decision, and had he but known it Lancelot Lee had penned her letter designing it to draw more confidences.

Subsequently Betty published Cresswell's letters; censoring them freely with asterisks * * * *. She said that he left Sidbury on 18th July and her first letter came on 22nd July (1746).

> It was with the utmost Regret that I left my dear, dear Betty and Nothing but the Expectation that we should meet and part no more could have enabled me to support it; Yet I must needs say that your Chearfulness after you were convinced that I sincerely and entirely loved you and your silent Grief at Parting has gave me such a calm Serenity of Mind that I was for sometime before an utter Stranger to.
>
> Would to God you were as thoroughly satisfied of my Love to you, but as you wisely told me, you never had any Proof of it.
>
> Yet my dear, it is not less ardent and if I knew how to convince you of it, it wod give me the greatest Satisfaction imaginable.
>
> I daresay no Man in England does or ever did Love a Woman better than I do thee, nor none ever with more Sincerity repented them of any Misdeed than I do, for having married the Beast at Bibury.
>
> God we are told pardons all Offences on a True and sincere Repentance and A Purpose of leading a new Life. As you imitate Him as much as Mortal ever did in all Respects, prithee do in this and

convince me of it by the Care you will take of your Health; and in the first Place seek all Amusements imaginable and let no jealous Fears of mine prevent thee.

Put it not out of the Power of Providence to make me happy, which I assure thee solemnly thy Death would absolutely do—Drink Brandy in thy Milk and be constant in Riding every Day and if that does not take off your Cough and Hecktic Feaver let the Doctor know it when you write to him **** keep steady to that Opinion of yours—that whatever is, is right—and build not entirely your Notion of Happiness on the Breath of the Multitude, for there is not in the World so precarious a Foundation.

Be strictly virtuous and knowing thyself to be so, mind not what Any think. If there is a God, He must delight in Virtue and what He delights in must be happy, either here or hereafter.

I hope Thou wilt be so in both Places and make me so here, which believe me my dear Girl, whatever you may think of it, it is your Duty to do.

Thou art mine as much as it is possible for a Woman to be a Man's. My having another does not make Thee less so, for by the Laws of this Land I should quit t'other and live with thee.

As it was our mutual Agreement made us one, so it must be our mutual Agreement to separate us. You should quit Father and Mother and cleave to thy Husband and that thou mayst have Pleasure both in the Thoughts of and in the Performance of thy Duty is the sincere Wish of . . . etc.

Betty did not find this letter 'entirely satisfactory' and thanked him 'only coolly'; neither were the following ones much better, being 'tediously long' and she published only extracts which show him to have been increasingly wracked by jealousy and tormented in his thoughts by images of herself with Lee.

Meantime his wife had rejoined him at Pinkney and they were alone together. He relates an incident to Scrope that was to become part of the prevailing scandal:

She seeing me uneasy and apprehending that the Cause was on account of your Sister getting married, eternally scolded me; which Ill-usage of hers and Thoughts of losing your Sister, almost drove me mad.

Fred came here; his Company did me much good:

Talking with him one Night in the Bowling Green concerning his Affairs which were not in good Order and I seriously thinking of them, intending to give him the best Advice I could, he suddenly turned round upon me and asked me to kill you; I replied 'Will you lie with my Wife?' 'No' said he; 'I hate her' said I; he reply'd 'I would not for the World'; 'Nor would she let you' said I; 'But why

then should I kill your Brother?'; 'Did I say so?'; 'Yes' said I, 'you should think before you speak'. I then advised him to lay open to you and his whole Family the true State of his Affairs and doubted not but you would assist him before it was too late.

This bemused conversation was too much for Fred's comprehension who later mentioned it to his sister who passed it on to Mr Lee, by that time busily engaged on preparing a case to prosecute Cresswell for bigamy and now added an intent to murder his wife.

All this time a number of letters were going to and fro in the post between Pinkney and Sidbury and a great deal of time must have been spent at their writing tables:

I just now received your Frightful long Letter. I sate up till Three this morning to answer your long one—Mine was eight sides and went by way of London—Own me publickly your Wife and I am ready and willing to go over the World with you. * * * *

My Dear Dear Betty the longing Desire of my Eyes, Soul of my Soul and End of all my Wishes—This Moment would I lose an Eye, Leg or Arm to be blessed for one single Hour with thy dear Company, to endeavour to set myself right in thy Esteem, which by writing I despair of, seeing you so prodigiously mistook my last.... Well of all Crimes charge me not with want of Love... [Pages of pleading follow] ... be honest Betty and keep your Contracts inviolable, for that is the Essence of Virtue and Religion ... ours was the most sacred and solemn one that People can enter into:

I did not marry this Woman because I was ashamed to refuse doing so to Lord Ducie, but because she had the Qualifications you desired my Wife should have, viz Money enough for all three and so ugly as to secure you from the Danger of losing my Affections: You know I did not propose being happy with her and she is of such a Temper that Nobody could, and had I not been engaged to you I should not have married such a Lump of Deformity, Foolishness and Ill-nature.

'Twas Money only that I thought necessary to my Happiness, no other Woman but you, of whose Possession I then thought myself as secure as of my own and thy Life * * * * I never will (give consent) unless you earnestly desire it and have great Prospect of Happiness and then I will—if it kills me—but never for you to marry in Revenge for me * * * *. This I can tell you as a Truth I have experienced, that if you love one Man you can never be happy with another, nor make him happy * * * *.

Betty said she lost all patience: she told Mr Lee the particulars

of her marriage and of a promise that she should have Sidbury in compensation and its equivalent value while her grandmother lived and that this was in Cresswell's will; but 'desired him not to expect a sight of the Letters which could not be shown'. It was a grave shock to Mr Lee and he was very uneasy, so she promised if the next letter was not satisfactory to read them, omitting only the parts of 'no Consequence'.

> He said 'I fancy Cresswell really believes you listen to my Addresses; Is there anything to this Purpose in his Letters? If there is, by no Means undeceive him'.

Betty then quotes a letter of her own; Miss Scrope to Mr Cresswell:

> It was not to promote my Happiness but Misery that you married this Woman, to have prevented which I would have died. That indeed after the Marriage my Intention was not to ruin you on account of the poor Woman and Child; that I would never marry again because I thought that religiously it would be wrong, not through Love of you, which is lessened.... You have my Affection still and it is in your Power to make me happy by owning me; but if you refuse this, for God's Sake resign me and suffer my Happiness with another.

But before this letter could reach Pinkney there came another apologetic epistle:

> If you do not love me well enough to Leave thy Friends, Relations and Country for me, surely my being ready to do it for Thee is no Sign of my not loving Thee.... Carr will be here [her sailor brother] and if thou canst have no Joy in my Company, surely that of all thy Brothers will afford Thee some....
>
> My Wife's Settlement is made and will be executed at Burford Races.
>
> I have received some more of her Money which I have paid away and am promised as much more at Michaelmas as will enable me to pay off Mrs Warneford, which if paid there will remain due to me £750 which I owe at Bristol.
>
> God bless thee. August 30th. Date thy Letter.

These letters were read over to Mr Lee, wrote Betty, who:

> seemed in general satisfied with all but that part of the Fourth, charging me with having consented to the Match.
>
> He urged me very earnestly to confess whether that Accusation was just, on the Truth or Falsity of which alone depended my Guilt

or Innocence; 'If true' said he 'the most prudent Way is Silence and Repentance; if false, fear not his hurting you by such an absurd Lie.

'Admitting it is true, you both joined to pillage and ruin an innocent Woman; if it is not and so I really believe.... Don't be afraid, when your Wrongs are published, his Schemes will be to clear himself, not blacken you and that End will not be answered by this Charge.

'Depend on it, if a Publick Defence is necessary he will not be so great a Fool as to invent a Lie of no Service to his own Character. Upon Reflection he will see that this, if really true, would stain himself much deeper than you; for all Mankind will be sure the Husband in such a Conspiracy must be the Tempter, consequently most guilty. No, No, there will be a Story made to extenuate his own Crimes....

'By his Letters it is clear he wants you as a Mistress not a Wife; that is he thinks it more prudent to part with your Reputation than his own....

'Press him positively to own or quit you and if the latter, say you will marry me.'

Like many worthy people Lancelot Lee fell easily into the sin of seeing evil where no evil was. His animosity blinded him to any innocency of thought or action and he could not believe that Cresswell was in love and remorseful, and anxious for Betty's welfare.

His marriage, rightly or wrongly was a business contract, in keeping with those times, from which some inkling of an affair between the cousins had not been excluded, and the money or 'pillaging' had been balanced by the attainment of its objective, the birth of a son and heir, followed by that of his sister, which gave happiness and security to the whole Bibury family, even though the actual marriage had not proved a happy one.

This satisfactory state of affairs was to be destroyed by a scandalous publicity, in order to satisfy personal animosity. Betty was also to be sacrificed, her cherished reputation ruined beyond repair.

Sometime in September Tom Cresswell received a letter telling him that if he would not assure her by return of post that he would immediately, publicly, say she was his wife, she would marry Mr Lee, who had now for the first time asked her, but she had told him that at present she had 'no Thoughts of changing her Condition'.

He relates that he told her he never would and that she might marry Mr Lee or not, just as she thought proper. That Mr Lee asked her again and she consented; 'from which Time in all her Letters she has ever abused me. . . .'

Betty published his letter which was very long so only extracts are given.

Dear Betty

You must excuse my not sooner determining an Affair of the highest Consequence to me.

My Son will have no Title to Bibury Estate but by being Heir-at-Law to his Grandfather. Bastards cannot inherit.

Therefore if I attempt to make him one, his Grandmother to vindicate his Rights, will prosecute me for marrying her Daughter, having another Wife alive, which is Felony: And I must deny it and you, on Oath, or I shall be condemned, if not hung.

No Woman that did, nay that ever pretended to love a Man, could with any Face attempt to draw him into such a Scrape. . . .

When Terms are offered that are impossible or impracticable they are ever esteemed as none. I shall therefore so esteem yours; and give you, as you desire it, leave to do as you please; and do hereby quit you of all Promises, Obligations and Contracts whatever, being desirous only to hold you by Love and if that fails. . . .

. . . Lee is the only Man besides myself that ever in earnest addressed you and you encouraged him more than commonly Women do . . . [a rigmarole follows] . . . had you determined to be just to me you wod have come hither, or accepted your Sister's Invitation—no Part of my Behaviour for these last two Years deserved this Usage.

If you have been unhappy, charge it not to me. God and you both know that in every other Action of my Life except marrying another Woman, I have endeavoured to make you happy, which I don't believe you will be by the Change. If Providence would give me now exactly such another Girl as yourself, in Rags, without Family or Relations, I should esteem myself the happiest of Men; And doubt not but that she should be so, of Women happier, I believe, than Mrs Lee will be if thou art she, which I can hardly yet believe thou wilt . . . for God damn me eternally if I wod have thee marry any other Man than myself, tho to purchase your Happiness at the Expence of my own Misery, I have consented to it * * * * [cut by Betty].

. . . You call on me to vindicate your Character which I will do by not telling immediately you are my Wife and then living with you—Nothing can make you so odious—all the World will despise you for it and will say that as you consented to my marrying another Woman, you should have kept it an eternal Secret, since it could answer no other End than to make yourself infinitely more odious and the Making other People vastly unhappy.

This in the event was precisely what the world did say, but it was too late. Betty had crossed her Rubicon and passed entirely under Lancelot Lee's control. She could not forgive Tommy for 'resigning her'; the current of her love changed direction and stimulated by his enemy became equally passionate in hatred. She could not have been more ill-advised and her adviser took care that she should be seldom out of his sight and never beyond his influence. She was caught in a web from which she was never to escape.

Cresswell's letter continued:

> ... Living with me as a second Wife, being neither contrary to the Laws of God nor to most Nations, had you behaved well you wod have been tolerably well respected and esteemed. As all People in the same Circumstances ever have been, you would have been excused on the score of Love and ten thousand other Things. But on the other Nothing can be said by Way of Vindication.
>
> Whatever you determine, pray let me know; and if you proceed with Lee tell me how it goes on, that I may be prepared to receive my Doom before it comes—if Love ceases, let Friendship subsist **** [cut by Betty].
>
> The Duchess of Beaufort is now a dying of her fourth Child or Labour. I hate my Wife because thro her I lost thee and when in Bed the other Night I gave her a kick **** She told me she was breeding but what signifies that to thee, who I believe are determined to have no more to say to me.

These letters were carefully perused by Lee and every indiscretion garnered for his prosecution.

Betty still declined marriage, maintaining the fiction that she was not free, and Lancelot said: 'Yet thus much I must demand, that you permit me to continue my Addresses and marry me if I outlive Cresswell.'

It might not be long if he could get his rival brought to trial and hung!

Betty printed her prim reply: that she would always esteem him the best of friends, but would enter into no engagement at so great an uncertainty; that a single life would be agreeable and after such misfortunes, most prudent; but if at any time her opinion should change, he would be her choice, though she desired him not to think this any engagement on his side, for his circumstances required a wife with money, but to forget her

and settle his affections with more prudence. 'This Advice only moved a Smile.'

She wrote to Tommy however thanking him for resigning her and saying she would now marry Mr Lee, but before her letter had time to reach Pinkney pages more of passionate protest came from him . . . 'she was religiously his wife . . . trying to make her break with Lee could not be called ill-usage . . . nor should any temptation of fortune make her slight himself for she had been his sole heir in all the Wills he had made in the past ten years and whilst he lived she was sure of commanding all he had.'

He meant his private means and Sidbury. Pinkney, liberated by his wife's money, was entailed:

> . . . as for his wife and family it would be equal for them for if he had not her, he would have another * * * * [censorship by Betty].
>
> . . . were you that righteous, virtuous Girl you wod ever have had me thought you, you might possibly have resolved on Continence, which if you did, I always promised you Sidbury Estate in the whole or in part, as you pleased. But that I am afraid is not one of your Virtues, Betty. . . . I desire thou wilt for old Love's Sake, contrive that I may be with thee alone for a Day or two * * * * I fancy such an intercourse will make my Parting with thee easier for me.
>
> You may contrive it by having Baylis's Stock seized etc. which at all events I desire thou wilt have done now Harvest is over, unless he keeps his Promise to me; If thou wilt not see me, don't do it till after Christmas, because Grannie will lose half-a-year's rent if you do, but John to have a strict Eye on him; But if thou wilt see me, do it when it is most convenient for that Purpose and regard not the half-year's Rent. But let me know sometime beforehand.
>
> Adieu Yours sincerely
>
> Pray write to me and if thou wilt see me, let no Lees, male or female be with thee at Sidbury.

Alas! for the treachery within the camp; 'I never saw a Man more enraged than Mr Lee at the Sight of this Letter' was Betty's comment.

More letters came from the unsuspecting Cresswell and were carefully combed through by Lee.

> * * * * if you will contrive to let me spend two or three Days with you alone before you marry, I will return your Hair. . . . 'Tis for your Sake I desire it infinitely more than for my own and I will behave towards you as I promised in my last. But, whether you will

see me or not, pray seize Baylis's Stock if he has not kept his Promise to me.

I fancy you may contrive to see me without giving any the least Disgust to Lee. The Friendship I promised you I meant to be strictly virtuous and from the Time you marry Lee I will never use the least Freedom, even if I should have an Opportunity, which I daresay I shall not.

As for the Box, I will not have it, but you have a plain gold Ring of mine that Mrs Lee can't claim any Title to. I will have that and for the Money you may do as you please.

Let me hear from you constantly till you are married and then I fancy the Correspondence will drop. Though you tell me my Excuse for not writing sooner was groundless, your Ladyship is mistaken. My God it was true, for, for three Days and Nights I was determined publickly to own Everything—and had I bin thoroughly satisfied that it would be agreable to you, I fancy now I should—but the Consideration that it was no Grace of yours, but a Thing that then was, now is, and will continue to be when I please, made me delay doing it for the present.

He referred to his narrative which he was now writing.

In October Mr Lee went to examine the Fleet registers to try and find proof of the secret marriage, concealing his mission carefully lest Cresswell should hear of it. Before leaving he insisted on Betty sending a submissive answer full of mild reproaches for past ill-usage and for wanting to see her. 'This was very distasteful,' she commented, 'but being only a Copier it was somewhat easier.' But hardly was Lee's back turned, on the day he set out for London, she could contain herself no longer—'I wrote a very long Answer . . . I undeceived him in regard to my Marriage with Mr Lee, but protested if he came to Sidbury, I would leave it. . . .'

She poured out her heart, giving full vent to her angry feelings because, as she now explained, her previous letters had all been written for her by Mr Lee and this, however necessary, had been beyond her patience—but they were by far the most favourable he had received and many parts absolutely against her own opinion, as 'they were calculated for no other End but to make him less circumspect, in which they had amply succeeded'. 'Mr Cresswell's next Letter was excessively abusive.'

Lee's mission failed and he returned to say it would be necessary for Betty to go to London herself, which she promised to do in the spring, not caring to leave her grandmother alone in the cold weather. But Lee brought back with him a memorandum of a register he had seen in the Fleet, dated some years before the secret marriage to Betty.

'Though trifling to him' she wrote 'being only taken to satisfy the Obstinacy of a drunken Fellow who owned the Book, to me it was of great Consequence, tending to clear a Part of Mr Cresswell's former Conduct by no Means satisfactory'. Sixteen lines of her book are here expunged in the familiar way * * * *.

She was to make use of this memorandum later on, and without doubt it referred to an early light-hearted escapade, for it recorded Christian names only, but neither she nor Lee dared publicize it, so the truth of it and the details are now unknown.

Pages more of Cresswell's private letters to her were published (to his great anguish), written while still unaware of how completely she had passed under Lee's influence, who took up residence that winter at Sidbury, so that she was always under his eye. They were by then officially engaged and he joined old Mrs Cresswell's household, which effectually kept her grandson away. He wrote:

> How injure Lee by seeing me, unless you tell him our whole Affair, is to me incomprehensible....
>
> Take Courage my Wench, don't mind my Threats for I can't prove our Marriage and the Law without Proof is dead....
>
> I am a melancholy, unhappy Wretch... but Nobody but you knows wherefore. Everybody else thinks it proceeds from my Wife's damnable Temper.... Betty be wise and keep your own Secret, nor of all People trust your Friend Lee with it, for it can answer no other Plan, making you both unhappy by lessening his Esteem etc. Pray how did my cursed Villainy prevent your marrying that dear Man eight Years ago? I am sure that I did not then love you and would have been glad that he or any body else had taken you off my Hands....

He went on to remind her how she had likened Lee's hands and feet to a large Baboon . . . and then how Lee had faded out of his courtship and disappointed her, when they had gone in violent rain and in a flood to Bridgnorth in expectation of seeing him at his mother's....

> Let us be quit and mutually forgive each other... my Dear Dear Betty, for such thou wilt ever be to me. I will never in any Shape or Manner injure thee more, but will most inviolably and strictly Keep thy Secret, thy most important Secret. Do thou likewise * * * *. Oh Betty, I have ten thousand different Feels for thee in a Moment, a strange Mixture of Love, Esteem, Passion etc. etc. Adieu my dearest Yours eternally.

Betty said her answer was almost ten folio pages 'but milder, hoping still to gain more Letters'.

She tried to get the point across that the advice to keep her secret was highly dishonourable and her virtue would not permit her to deceive Lee about her past, but her precepts did not altogether match her behaviour.

Although she cut them, the quantity of letters published unaltered, sometimes almost incoherent, full of casual eighteenth century spelling that now makes tedious reading, confirm the truth of the candid but more sober narrative her cousin was eventually compelled to publish to prevent prosecution.

> Betty which way am I thy Enemy or ever was so? Since my present Confinement [he had gout] I have wrote a true State of our Case [his Narrative] as it appears to me, in which I cannot discover either the Villain, the Enemy or the Goat....
>
> I like not your retailing paragraphs of my Letters to Lee, to whom you durst not refuse showing the whole, were he to ask, as you have told me three Months ago.
>
> What am I to expect from a Man that you have ever represented to me as extremely jealous and of great and insatiable Curiosity.
>
> Your Behaviour in this Affair not being to be accounted for by any one uniform Rule; your Certainty of his becoming your Friend and being no longer your Lover; Your Saying my Coming would prejudice you in his Opinion, particularly if he happened to be absent, which to me is unaccountable if he knows no more than he ought; and several other Things too long for me to mention, makes me fancy what at other Times I think you have neither the Folly nor Wickedness great enough to do; for if you have done it you... have made yourself miserable and will be the Cause of the Misery of several other innocent People, that know not what Virtue or Vice are. I will tell you once more; It is that, that tends most to the Happiness or Misery of Mankind—of which your Judgement and Nothing else is to determine—and by that if you act, you are safe....
>
> All the People here that think about me, wonder that I do not go to see my Grandmother, so must everyone in Shropshire, even Lee himself. Then how can my Coming, if he was either absent or

present, prejudice you in his Opinion, if you behaved as you ought to do as his betrothed Wife and my near Relation etc., supposing him to know no more than he ought to do. . . .

The long letter flowed on in the usual way. Probably Betty only glanced through it, enough to cut the past page or so * * * * leaving the ending:

I wod not have touched your Hand or kissed your Lips had I perceived it the least disagreable to you. Adieu.

This is the last Letter I will ever write to thee that you need fear showing Anybody. Were we entirely to leave off writing to one another, I think it would have an odd Look, but however, just as you please. I doubt not finding another Correspondent that will satisfy me of all Things relating to you and Grannie. . . . * * * *

Pray tell me when you think you shall be married; whether you seized Baylis's Stock and how it is like to turn out; whether Barker or any good Tenant will take it at the old Rent; and when you think I may come to Sidbury without hurting you,

Adieu

Mr Lee now felt the right time had come to enlighten the Scrope brothers about what had been going on under their noses for so long. They had all been staying at Pinkney, where Betty had also been bidden and he had had thoughts of accompanying her, to make his unwelcome disclosures, but had resolved against it while there was still a chance of gleaning useful items from the letters. He now wrote to Gervase Scrope in Lincolnshire a letter 'that prevented his return to Pinkney', but Fred went back and 'was imposed on. . . .'

Betty: Very soon after my Brother Fred came to Sidbury and brought two Letters from Mr Cresswell. He did not own this to Mr Lee but delivered them privately. One was of no Consequence to be shown my Grandmother or him. . . . [The other was in the familiar vein] I believe that had you used constant and regular Exercise * * * * that you wod have been much better, both in Body and Mind than you are at present. . . . Adieu, pray take all Care that you can of your Health, a return of which may perhaps bring a calm, sedate and determined Mind.

Yours affectionately

'I was just mad,' commented Betty. She carried the letter directly to Mr Lee and her brother Carr, then at Sidbury, and left them.

Her brothers went away and all her thoughts now centred on going to London in the spring to seek proof of her marriage.

Betty's nature was emotional. She had never meant to do wrong. It could not be her fault, it could only be her cousin's that the whole deplorable situation had arisen—and the flame of her wrathful indignation was constantly fanned by the jealous and scheming Lancelot Lee.

For the rest of that sadly unfortunate winter, 1746–47, the correspondence between Sidbury and Pinkney was mainly agricultural and financial, not without interest since the Sidbury estate is still intact to this day.

Betty:

> He had left my Grandmother in July greatly in Debt without any Money and the Arrears in her Jointure of between £400 and £500 a year amounted to above £5,000.
>
> All was done by his Direction and in August my Brother took with him [to Pinkney] an Account of her Affairs, but could get no Answer.
>
> The Bills were very considerable and I was greatly puzzled how to act. Mr Lee advised me to call upon the Tenants. I did and with the Money paid some Bills; and retrenching Expenses in Housekeeping for a Time, did tolerably well.
>
> The Distress Mr Cresswell ordered was taken a little after Michaelmas and the Stock was nearly sufficient to keep on the Farm. Unfortunately a Tenant, who rented £105 a year, died before Christmas and we were obliged to make a public Sale of his Effects.
>
> My Grandmother could not set either of these Farms, nor had she Money enough to manage or repair them. She ordered me to apply to her Grandson for some; I did but could get no Answer.
>
> The Reason for her Application was—some Years before she had remitted to him to London £400 to lay out in Salt Tallies for her; but he, instead of buying these Tallies, or instead of returning the Money when they were sold out, kept it for his own use, giving a Note and promising Interest, which he never paid, always laughing when it was demanded. She used to be angry and keeping the Note very carefully, protested that the Principal and the Interest should be paid should she ever want it.
>
> When she was seized with the Palsy Stroke he one day went into her Closet, the Key being always in the Door, and brought this Note to me, desiring it might be burnt. I refused and he, to my great Surprise, threw it in the Fire saying 'Perhaps now her Understanding is weak she may be induced to make another Will; if that should be so, there can be no Demand for this Money'.

I thought it monstrously wicked and said: 'If on Recovery she should ask for the Note, what can I say?' He replied 'Let me know and I will send another Security for the same Sum. I would not deprive my Grandmother of it but she shan't give it to anybody else.'

There was no one to speak to about it; she was not capable of understanding any Complaint; and knowing him her Heir I therefore said Nothing, nor ever should till they were wanted and then not before Application to him.

After twice writing Mr Lee advised me to tell her; but added laughing 'Depend on it, he will never part with a Farthing or he would not have burnt the Note'.

He spoke to her; She was prodigiously angry and ordered me to write again, but the Answers were all trifling.

In one of Cresswell's letters is a reference to this episode.

When your Hand was in, telling Grannie about the Notes, I hope you told her whose Scheme it was or have you left that for me to do and are yourself determined to deny it on Oath. . . .

Betty laughed at his accusation and called it a lie:

I read that part of your Letter to my Grandmother and Mr Lee and when my Brothers come, shall not fear doing so to them.

Lewis's and Baylis's Farms are both in our Hands, nor can either be set. The former has not a Horse nor a Beast on it, nor have we £50 in the House to purchase any or, should a Tenant offer, to put either in Repair, which Baylis's alone will cost £30 in doing * * * *.

Again Tom Cresswell wrote, begging her to see him, assuring her he was her friend. . . . 'I hope as often as Granny knows you hear from me, you make proper Compliments to her from me, etc.'

Betty:

This to your last Letter trifling as before. I will never see you but on the Terms I have mentioned and then not by Choice. You have been and are my most bitter Enemy * * * *. My Grandmother always hears when you write and has heard enough from me not to regard any of your Compliments. I showed her that Paragraph of your last, this Moment; (She is in my Room with Mr Lee) Her Answer, 'I want Money, let him by Way of Compliment send what he owes me'.

Mr Cresswell to his grandmother:

Honrd Madam

My Cousin B. Scrope having mentioned in a ridiculous Manner something concerning Notes for Money that I formerly gave you and

since burnt, never letting me know that you wanted Money, I treated it with the Scorn I thought it deserved.

I knew not that Baylis's Farm was unlet or that Sidbury Farm was in Hand or that you had no Money in the House till I received her last Letter. Otherwise I should have returned a serious Answer.

I have no Money at present. Five Days ago I had not Five Pounds, though Child is to pay me this Month the Balance due to me for the Timber. What it will amount to, can't say—my Cousin B. Scrope has all the Papers relating to it and can easily account with him.

Whatever it is I will pay it in part, and if you will borrow as much more of Gitton's as you want, I will undertake to repay it; and when I next see you give Security for the remaining Sum, which I did design doing for the Whole, not at all dreaming that you at present wanted Money.... [He proceeds with an explanation of the incident of the Notes].... I am sure there was no Evil designed by either of us.... My Wife and Child are well. We all join in proper Compliments to you. I am honoured Madam your most dutiful and obedient Grandson, Thomas Estcourt Cresswell.

This letter was accompanied by one for Betty :

Dear Cousin

Was it well done of you, after having kept me quite ignorant of my Grandmother's Affairs, to charge me with a Design of distressing her.

I thought Baylis's Farm had been tenanted, having a great while ago desired you to let it for what you could get. Was it wisely done of you to let the whole Stock be sold before you had let it or even before you were in expectation of so doing—how is the Land to be plowd and sowd? Sow Clover with all the Corn you sow this Spring, either there or at Sidbury.

I did not know you had no Money in the House, or that Sidbury Farm was in hand. If you could have kept young John Lewis, you should have done it, almost on any Terms. He is a young Fellow of Substance, great Understanding in his Profession, very diligent and sober.

Such as he are not every Day to be met with. Who is to be Bayley?

The idle and ridiculous Manner in which you always mentioned to me the Affair of the Notes made me despise it, thinking then of seeing my Grandmother in a little Time and satisfying her about it. But as I shall not see her this Spring I have wrote to her this Post about it, and have told her the true State of the Case, which I am certain of because your voluntary Proposal to Steal them and your Refusal of Burning them, struck me instantly and made a strong Impression on my Memory; as likewise did your Answer to my Saying, supposing my Grandmother should recover and miss them—

I am now on the Recovery, [from Gout] but have been extremely ill, my Fabric never having had such a Shock before, at least I think so * * * * I am dear Cousin very much yours

Mrs Cresswell Gr:M. to Mr Cresswell

[My Grandmother ordered me to write the following answer, which she signed, wrote Betty.]

I am sorry the Manner in which your Cousin B. Scrope mentioned the Notes appeared ridiculous to you. To me it seemed serious; Such I was when I ordered her to write and when I directed her what to write . . . (there follows a letter unmistakably of Betty's composition). . . . Your Affairs at Pinkney are a sufficient Employment without your meddling here, where you neither have any Concerns at present, nor shall have during my Life. I have revoked the Will once made in your Favour and have made Miss Scrope my sole Executrix; a small Return indeed for the Trouble and Uneasiness she has received in my Family.

I am positively determined to make you pay all the Money you are indebted to me, which is very considerable; what I have not immediate Occasion for, my G.Daughter shall have . . . if I should receive none (no answer) or a trifling one like your last, Miss Scrope shall immediately write to my Nephew. You can no longer deceive your much injured and afflicted Grandmother, M. Cresswell.

The old lady was now eighty-two. Her nephew was Lord Ducie who had introduced Anne Warneford into the family. Betty must have felt her financial freedom was almost in sight and Mr Lee looked like winning a Fortune if he succeeded in marrying her.

Betty:

No Notice being taken of my Grandmother's Letter and she in great Distress for Money, Mr Lee advised her to consult with the Man who had before purchased Timber of her Grandson, whether there was some Cordwood then ready? He said there was some which should have been fallen five or six Years before, with which and more of a proper Growth, about £50 might be raised, without any detriment to the Heir. My Grandmother immediately ordered it to be cut.

Mr Lee was no more concerned than through extreme Caution, sending his own Steward to look over what was designed for sale, lest any Damage be done.

Nay, I very well remember there was some Debate whether a small Coppice of Ash should be fallen or not; and that it remained uncut was entirely owing to him, whose Observation upon it was this: 'I think Cresswell as great a Villain as ever lived. He has injured his Grandmother very much by not paying the

> Money; yet I will not consent that she hurts him in this Manner; the Coppice in dispute will in a few Years be of much greater Value and at this Time will be a trifling Addition to the Fall'. Tho. Child picked it out, felled and bought all that was fallen . . . by Profession a Timber Merchant and a very skilful one.
>
> Mr Cresswell after this . . . left all his Affairs in Shropshire under the Management of this Man . . . set him a Farm of £100 a Year and made him Steward and Receiver of his Rents.

Nothing could have been more infuriating for Tom Cresswell than to be kept away from Sidbury because of Mr Lee, and then to have him interfering with the estate and of all things cutting timber without reference to himself. Clearly action had to be taken—and was.

This then was the pattern of life woven at Sidbury that winter. The thread of Lancelot Lee's personality dominated.

He was absorbed in the preparation of his case for a prosecution and without doubt derived intense satisfaction from his rival's ignorance of the true situation, playing him like a fish. The minnows who were the Scrope brothers were already gasping in his net.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Scandal

Heav'n has no rage like love to hatred turn'd
Nor Hell a fury like a woman scorn'd.

Congreve 1670–1729.

LONDON 1747.

BETTY DID NOT immediately apply to Lord Ducie about her grandmother's debt, but waited until she should see him.

He told her:

> I will not concern myself about any Disputes between Grandmother and Grandson; but if there is anything between him and you wherein I can be of Service, I am very ready.

This alarmed her because all her friends were pressing her to marry Mr Lee, whose public courtship had now been going on for six months, but she was afraid it was only for her cousin's benefit.

There is ample evidence that friends tried to save her from her headlong path to ruin, but hate was in control and Lee was steadily working in the background for his rival's destruction, using her as his accomplice.

> ... All my Relations consenting, most of my Acquaintance pressing, Mr Lee too, to whom I was prodigiously obliged.... Nothing but the Fear of it being wrong against all this very strong Temptation....

But the fundamental truth was she did not love Mr Lee and did not want to marry him.

One day her friends' eagerness to get her married 'hurried her

Temper beyond its usual reserve' and in the heat of the moment she said so much that, on repeating it to Mr Lee, he advised her to tell Lord Ducie everything.

She described their conversation verbatim:

Ld D. I am sorry there is any Dispute between Mr Cresswell and Miss Scrope; if I can reconcile them, I will.

Mr L. My Lord, it is in your Power to prevent all being made public, if you please. The State of Affairs is this: When I first courted Miss Scrope, near ten Years ago, Cresswell engaged her, but forced her by many Arguments to be silent. Some Years after he married her, but still obliged her to Secrecy.

Ld D. What, did he marry her?

Mr L. Yes, he did in the Fleet, in 1742.

Ld D. Then he is mad, and considering his Family we must not be surprised.

Clearly Lord Ducie had not approved his feckless Jacobite cousin.

Mr L. He made her let him court several Women in order to make their Marriage less suspected; with all whom he still found Pretences to break off. Thus he deceived her into his Marriage with Miss Warneford, and on his Return Home he endeavoured to pacify her to no Purpose.

Finding that ineffectual he threatened to deny the Marriage if she dared own it, and declare her his Mistress for she could no Way prove it.

But if she would be silent and not disturb him, he would give her Sidbury Estate which was kept open and an Annuity of £100 a Year till he could by the Grandmother's Death put her in Possession.

She told him she would be silent on condition that he never gave her any Disturbance. When it was past Remedy she was silent through Fear, not knowing how to prove her own Marriage.

Ld D. She did very right. [What did he mean by the Word 'right' interpolated Betty] But how can she prove it now?

Mr L. By my Care—as soon as she told me I corresponded with Cresswell in her Name and he in his Answers has confessed the whole Affair.

Ld D. Then he is a Fool.

Mr L. All Knaves are Fools. [Betty noted 'I do not remember that he agreed with Mr Lee in this Particular'] Now my Lord, you have heard of this Affair, what do you think of it?

Ld D. I suppose what you drive at is a Sum of Money?

Mr L. No, my Lord, if he would give her a Million it would not be Satisfaction.

Ld D. What then? Would you take Sidbury Estate from him?

Mr L. Yes, my Lord, those were his own Terms and no other will be accepted.

Ld D. Well, I am sorry for these Misfortunes. I will speak to Cresswell, hear his Story and see you to-morrow.

Mr L. It is not possible for you to conceive the Villainy of that Man. The second Marriage is his smallest Crime. I have great Reason to think him capable of Murder. I do not speak against my Enemy because I hate him, all my Expressions are simply Extracts out of his own Letters. My Lord, he is the blackest of Villains; from his own Confessions I know he made Proposals of Murder to this unfortunate, abused Woman.

Ld D. She has been abused indeed. They are both equally related to me and I will judge between them both impartially; but must indeed lean to her Side, thinking her deeply injured.

Lord Ducie left them and came again next day.

Ld D. I have been with Cresswell and find he is a very great Villain. I am sorry you must suffer, but will take Care Miss Warneford is not injured. This perhaps may be brought before the Legislature; if it is I will use all my Interest to get an * * * * to confirm the second Match.

Mr L. You talk idly, my Lord; Your Interest may go a great Way, Times are very bad and therefore I dread every Thing from a * * * * [probably he said Whig Government], but, thank God, they are not so bad that the Legislature will confirm Things so directly contrary to Reason. My Lord, you talk, but you can't do it.

Ld D. I will concern myself no farther with this Affair. Your Servant.

Mr L. Your Servant.

Betty. He left us.

The arrogant young Tory squire of 700 years' standing was not in awe of the wealthy eighteenth-century Whig peer, despite his Norman descent and seniority in age and rank, and his Lordship found the younger man insufferable.

Failing to end the matter privately and determined to proceed with their plot, they now decided to write to Mrs Warneford and warn her that her daughter's life might be in danger when Cresswell returned to Pinkney.

Betty added that she did not expect to get Sidbury and only proposed it knowing Mr Cresswell would refuse. She could not accept a compromise because it would have made her refusal to her friends to marry Mr Lee very difficult, and her resolution was formed against compliance. She still considered herself safely

married, but thought the memorandum unearthed by Lee in the Fleet might conscientiously free her. All the particulars of it have been censored * * * *. Probably the girl concerned was now married to someone else and even Mr Lee dared not involve her family, but Betty had guessed her identity and therefore many others would have done so, thus colouring the scandal. She primly records that the probability of the story being true permitted her to be 'easy in Mr Lee's stay at Sidbury from November to February'. Before the former month she received no visits from him and only paid them to his sisters, but thereafter he was constantly at Sidbury by the express desire of her grandmother.

As soon as the express had been dispatched to Mrs Warneford, Cresswell left London, and the coast now clear, Betty hurried off to the Fleet to examine the registers. She soon found * * * * agreeable to Mr Lee's memorandum * * * * and her next search was for some legal proof of her own marriage. She recounted:

> I easily went to the House, for the Shape and the Furniture was deeply imprinted in my Memory; and my Description of it was so minutely particular that Mr Lee in his first Journey had found it.
>
> I saw neither the Clergyman or the Woman Clerk.
>
> The former by all Enquiry we could make, died about Christmas 1745. I did not know his Name, therefore cannot positively declare this, but above one Hundred People, separately, by my Description, pitched upon this Man, whose Name was Ashwood. His Person was uncommonly remarkable.
>
> The Woman was not so particular, so that I could not make the least Guess what was become of her, my Description being too faint for any One to know her by.

But she no longer wanted to establish her marriage, she added, as she might be compelled to live with a man she now detested and there would have been no probability of getting a divorce; also her fortune though small was now certain and would be changed by marriage to 'a precarious separate maintenance' as most of Mr Cresswell's estate would go to satisfy Miss Warneford; and lastly in point of revenge no advantage could be gained, for on legal proof of three marriages he would have enjoyed with all other felons, the common benefit of the Act of Grace.

For these reasons Mr Lee always promised her brothers to marry her when they could gain her consent—but she refused

absolutely. Her reasoning obliged her in her own justification to make her marriage with Cresswell public; she was not allowed to free herself by disclosing an even earlier marriage and so declared she would have gone to Lincoln and chosen to remain single had he not published his narrative, to which she felt impelled to reply. But when her book was finished and she had in fact mentioned the marriage ceremony earlier than her own, and so on all counts was morally and publicly free, she produced as the reason for still refusing to marry Lee, that he needed a wife with money.

But to return to Cresswell's narrative and life as it was being woven into eternity at Pinkney and at Bibury.

The winter had not been a happy one. Husband and wife detested each other. Tormented by jealousy, wracked with gout, his wife found him morose and intolerable and 'made herself a wretch' and he complained that she perpetually scolded him, although Scrope himself had tried sometimes to intervene. At last, 'in the most endearing Manner possible', he entreated her to alter her behaviour if only for one week—and she promised on condition he would consent to part with her, allow her a separate maintenance and prevail with her mother to let her live at Bibury, to which he agreed—but she was not able to keep her side of the bargain for a day. Unable to endure her longer he went to London, telling her if she could get anybody, he didn't care who, to be with her constantly in the house, he would try again to live with her, but otherwise would never try again; and also wrote to her mother to that effect.

> I declare solemnly I never once began quarrelling with her; very seldom or ever gave her a miss Word, never till highly provoked; though after I had tried all ways in vain I have, when she has been in Bed a scolding, poured out of a Bottle a little Cold Water upon her, which though it had not an immediate good Effect, yet talking of the Bottle did for two or three Nights procure me quiet.
>
> But at last that failed me, so that I had nothing left for it but Patience, let her talk on till she was tired and out of Breath, then she would go to sleep.

Although his thoughs were all of Sidbury, he would not go there and declared to Scrope:

> It was not your Sister's persuading my Grandmother to alter her Will; nor Mr Lee's felling and cutting down Cordwood that was not fit to be cut down, and living in such an extravagant, expensive Manner that her two head Servants were determined to leave her; it was not that, that could make me go to Sidbury for I had promised your Sister that I would not. . . .

Having refused to declare his son a bastard and having sent Betty her formal release (for which she never forgave him) that she might announce her engagement to Lee, he now began to suspect that they might actually be married and acting under Lee's directions she was trying to bully him out of money; so Fred was sent to Sidbury with the letters to find out and reported curiously enough that they were very fond of each other, but whether married or not, he could not say, 'but if they were not he believed they would be in a little while'.

There were other irritations. Parson Warneford was withholding his wife's annuity; a large bill for tea and chocolate delivered to Sidbury had come to him from a grocer; these, combined with his wife's scolding and his own tormented thoughts, made him call for his horse and ride to London.

There he received a message from Lord Ducie that if he did not give Betty his Sidbury estate, he was to be prosecuted.

He told him he would not; that they could do him no hurt; that Betty pretended to be his wife. 'Nay,' said Lord Ducie, 'they mentioned nothing of that to me, so I will neither tell you what they said, nor them what you said'; was in haste and left but said he might go the next day and tell the whole story, if he pleased.

Cresswell accordingly told him the whole story 'in a short Manner' but Lord Ducie replied that they had both used him very ill in letting him through Mr and Mrs S . . . propose him to Mrs Warneford as a fit match for her daughter, and so he would have nothing more to do with either of them.

But Tom Cresswell begged him in the strongest manner he possibly could, to interpose, and if it was in his power, to prevent two young people, his relations, from ruining one another's reputations for no end or purpose. Lord Ducie said he would consult a friend whose head was better than his own and act the part of an honest man.

Cresswell's narrative to Scrope:

I was strangely distracted in my own Mind to find out what Lee meant, sometimes fancying that they were married, sometimes that they were not, and that Lee, as I would not give him the Estate would, by ruining your Sister's Reputation, take Occasion to declare off. I by Fred desired to see them . . . I went to your Sister's Lodging somewhat before the Time, thinking possibly I might then speak to her by myself, but could not. Lee came in twenty Minutes. I staid about ten Minutes, your Sister not coming into the Room.

I sent her a Letter by Fred, telling her that Lee was going to ruin her, desired her to quit the Villain for an Hour and talk with me. Fred brought it back to me again and said both his Sister and Mr Lee said it was not for her, yet they had read it. . . .

What malicious pleasure for Lee thus to bait his enemy. Tom Cresswell gave up all thoughs of seeing her unless in Lee's company and a day or two afterwards they had an interview, of which Betty gave one of her verbatim reports. Cresswell's account said that he told her of Lord Ducie's message: 'Ay' said she and he replied 'And if I give you the Estate you will marry that Man?' looking at Lee; 'Ay, why not', said she to which Lee assented. He then told her he would not increase her fortune a farthing if she did so, whereupon Lee put in that without the fortune he could not afford to marry her as much of his estate was already settled (presumably on his large number of brothers and sisters).

T.E.C.: I laughed at him and he threatened me with Prosecution. I told him and her that they could get Nothing but Infamy and Shame by it; She said 'Revenge'; and he swore I should be prosecuted. . . . I asked Lee what made him so sure . . . told him that I fancied it was no Business of his; His replied that he would do Nothing without the Consent of all the Scropes, with which Answer I appeared satisfied saying, 'surely they will not all do wrong'; asked your Sister how she came to tell Lee anything about our Affairs; she said she did not but he found out. I laughed at her and asked her to go into the next Room, in Lee's view, and talk with me; she returned no Answer; Lee said 'Do as you will, but if you do, I will give you up'.

I replied after some Pause 'Do not' thinking I would not furnish him with a Pretence of deserting a Girl whose Reputation he was going to ruin.

Betty told him that she had had four letters from him after he had consented to her marrying Lee before she had told Lee, so her cousin calculated that to be eight weeks because he wrote

once a fortnight. The Post Office procedure 200 years ago was that a letter sent to the post on a Saturday from Pinkney arrived at Sidbury in the middle of the next week. The answer posted from Sidbury on Saturday always reached Pinkney on the following Wednesday, to be answered again by Saturday following.

Cresswell asked Fred what had been said after he was gone, to which Fred replied that Lee had told Betty 'she had a Mind to talk with you and she said she had not'.

The attack was now hotted up. When Tom Cresswell tried to see 'Tommy' Scrope (the legal brother) he failed and got an 'abusive threatening letter', then one came from Fred and finally one from Gervase, all declaring they would not see him on any terms. . . . Again he tried to see Betty and went by her window but saw Lee and Tommy within, which satisfied him that either they were married or Lee had promised the brothers that he would marry their sister if they would back him up against himself, and 'from his Character,' wrote Cresswell grimly, 'I knew what to expect'.

Below is a note declaring that 'Mr Lee has the Character of persecuting those he has Ill-will to, with great Rancour and Malice, without regarding either his own Interest or Reputation. His unjust and barbarous Treatment of Mr S . . . n, a Man of Truth, Honour and Sincerity, justifies me in this Remark, for Mr S . . . n has assured me he was ever his Friend and ever served him with Zeal'.

'Yet [continued Cresswell to his cousin] I ceased not doing Everything in my Power to prevent your publishing this Affair and no Man ever took more true Pains to so little Purpose.'

But he was getting tired of it all and the following Sunday morning, riding out of town with some friends, designing to lie in the country and return on Monday, as he passed the house in Piccadilly where all the Scropes had been, he stood in his stirrups and looked into the dining-room, where he saw a man in his night cap and a woman, whom he mistakenly took to be Mr Lee and Betty: 'It gave me no more Emotion that it did my Horse.'

Then came the letter from Lee warning him that Mrs Warneford would be told of the affair and so he left London and hastened to Bibury.

Lee was evidently working through Gervase Scrope since he

had no authority himself, for Betty published the following letter:

Goster Street May 4th 1747. Mr Cresswell to Mr Scrope.
Sir

I could not answer your Letter sooner. I desire you will not make Mrs Warneford unhappy a Day sooner than you can avoid—you have no right to do it—when you have made this Affair public by Prosecution I will then, and not before, tell her and the World the true Case, which I have never yet done to Anyone, nor will do till you begin, because it would be as wicked in me as in you; and from that Time refrain from abusive Language for I will not then bear it, though I have hitherto because I wod not be the Aggressor—yet I hope the Time will never come—.

When you apply to the Lawyers they will tell you better, and I fancy even I—wod you hear me without Lee—for in his Company I will not tell the Case, could satisfy you that that is most wicked and foolish and can conceive no other Reason that you won't, than the Fear of not being able afterwards to Justify your Conduct to the Publick by publishing the Case.

Scrope gave this letter to Lee to answer and it was Lee who wrote to Mrs Warneford. The brothers were hopelessly in his power and subject to his incessant propaganda.

Mr Lee to Mr Cresswell: May 5th 1747.
Sir

Letters from you to any of the Mr Scropes or myself are looked upon as an Address to all of us.

In this Affair I am as a Brother, a Favour the Family have been so good as to grant me....

Mr Cresswell to Mr Lee:

I took you to be a Man of Sense and as such, if you meant being a Brother you would never have prosecuted me unless your Rancour and Ill-will had overcome your Understanding.... Though I never told any One the true and whole State of the Case ... never talked of it save to Fred and Lord Ducie ... never told it so much in my Favour as it is, the Truth shall come out....

There is the suggestion of a duel.

Lee: ... when the Prosecution is over ... rest assured that from some of us you shall receive that Redress you so much want and believe me, Mr Cresswell, en Sang Froid, I wish the Lot may fall to one you have so deeply injured.

Cresswell: ... you have in this whole Affair, without Cause or Reason or Advantage to yourself in any Shape, meanly and scandalously attempted my Ruin. I wish the Lot may fall on you; Choose it; I

hope they will let you; if not and I survive, I will be always ready for you.

Cresswell also sent a last personal letter to Betty before he gave up and sent his attorney, Mr Witts.

Dear Betty

You may as well attempt to fly over the Moon as to gain anything by a Prosecution, but Infamy. Quit the Villain Lee and let me talk with thee alone, to try if any Thing can be done to save thee.

Betty Scrope's report of the meeting in London in the preceding month, April 1747.

Mr Lee, Fred and I in the Room. Mr Cresswell coming in . . . he fixed his Eyes with a very wild Look on me and remaining silent near five Minutes, asked how I did? with so trembling a Voice I could hardly understand him. I said 'very indifferent'.

Mr Lee: I suppose our Conference with Lord Ducie was the Occasion of your coming here? It is now clear to you that none of your Transactions with Miss Scrope are Secrets to me. You know the Proposals and are to give an Answer whether you will comply or no.

Mr C: I do. I spoke to Lord Ducie yesterday. Why did you speak to him and not rather apply to me first?

Mr L: I did not intend speaking to any Body yet, particularly to Lord Ducie, but when convenient should have spoke to you. Miss Scrope, some Days ago at the R . . . s where she saw Lord Ducie, asked his Advice about the Note; had you settled that, this Affair had not been made publick so soon. He refused concerning himself about it, but offered if he could to be of Service between you two, he would do it with Pleasure. He and the R . . . s pressed her beyond her Temper that she declared so much as to oblige me to tell the whole.

I condemned her for it, but they all pressed her so hard that she was very excusable.

Mr C: Yes, Lord Ducie told me that she declared so much that they were obliged to stop her abruptly.

Betty: It is false. They asked me almost Everything I told and condemned me so strongly for not marrying Mr Lee immediately that in my own Justification I was bound to say what I did.

Mr Lee: I daresay that is true and it was your Fault, not hers, that this was made so Publick. Why had you not given her a proper Release when she first demanded it? Instead of which you sent her one of no Consequence and even that you prevented her making any Use of. If you wished that all should be secret, why threaten her?

Mr C: To frighten her and prevent her Marriage.

Mr Lee: Possibly you may suffer most from these Threats. When I found you thus determined upon distressing her, I undertook the Correspondence and wrote every Letter since, all of which are now by me with your Answers.

Mr C: You have not acted right.

Mr Lee: Yes I have for her, if not for you.

Mr C: When you knew her Situation you ought to have applied to me and not acted as you have done.

Mr L: I verily believe you think so; but I did not know how you would receive me and thought it most prudent before I made any Proposals, to get such Proof as would force Acceptance of any Proposals.

Mr C: That you have not now, for no Confession of mine in Letters will signify any Thing. If she and I both should by Consent own every Thing, it would not do. Do you consider what Evidence is necessary to prove Felony?

Mr Lee: I do and have as strong Proof as I would wish.

Mr C: You are deceived. I hope you will consult the Brothers first.

Mr L: You are very careful to remind me of these Things and rest assured Nothing shall be deficient.

Mr C: Pray consult the Brothers and before you proceed take Mr Strahan's Opinion; he will tell you that no Confessions of ours are of any Consequence.

Mr Lee: I know what Evidence is sufficient; Our Case is so directly plain that such an Opinion will be needless; Yet on Consultation with the Brothers, what they desire shall be done. This Discourse is of no Consequence. Will you comply in giving up to her the Shropshire Estate and signing a proper Release? If you will not, you shall be prosecuted.

Mr C: I will not.

Mr L: Then by God you shall be prosecuted. When I first courted Miss Scrope, I thought her single—you came down and broke off the Match—I loved and on your leaving the country endeavoured to renew Courtship and still thought Success probable; You have, by declaring her your Wife, cut off all my Hopes.

Mr C: How did I break off the Match?

Mr Lee: I suspected something by your ungenerous Behaviour at Coton.

Mr C: I had no Intention of behaving ill. It was far from my Thoughts.

Mr L: It is of no Consequence whether you did or no. The Intent of our Meeting is to know whether you will comply or not.

Mr C: Supposing that I did comply, would that Estate make her more free or enable her to marry you?

Mr L: No. You have declared her to be your Wife, I can have no Pretensions; but supposing that you could release her I should expect that Estate, it being her own by the Agreement you made

after your last Marriage; and even in point of Interest I could not marry her safely, part of my Estate being entailed to which no Child of hers can inherit.

Mr C: I may as well confess to all the World, for None will suppose I will give that Estate up, unless on Refusal I could be compelled.

Mr Lee: Very true. Her enjoying it at your Grandmother's Death might not be known so long as you lived; but on your Death it must have been publick since you left it to her in your Will: Could the World suppose you would give from your own Family so large an Estate without passing the same Judgement it could now?

Mr C: It would be the same; but their Judgement would not then affect me. I should not be sensible of ought that could be said.

Mr Lee: Very well, Sir. You have refused and the Law must determine it; had you desisted on your last leaving Sidbury, I would have engaged her; but you have said she is your Wife and I will cease my Pretensions.

Mr C: What say you, Betty? Am I as Mr Lee says, to be prosecuted?

Betty: Yes.

Mr C: You cannot touch my Fortune by a Prosecution. You may hurt my Reputation, but you in prosecuting will make yourself infamous.

Betty: I know my own Innocence will support me against any Thing you can say. You can't now terrify me; for even admitting I should make myself infamous (which is impossible) if I had no other Way of punishing you, I should disregard that. The Terms proposed you made yourself and with no others will I comply. You have ever prevented my Happiness, it is now in my Power to punish you; and rest assured to do that I would smilingly walk to my Execution. Were I freed from you, the only Hope I should have of Happiness would be from Mr Lee, which you have (as you think) twice disappointed me of; once when he courted me long since and now when you thought me on the Point of Marriage with him. Ever since my Engagement to you I have not enjoyed one Moment's Peace and have suffered from you as much as Woman could suffer from Man.

Mr C: Poor Girl! I do believe I have been the Occasion for all your Misery and that you have suffered a great Deal of my Account. I wish it had been otherwise. I ever loved you and when at Pinkney I thought you determined to marry Mr Lee, for three Days and Nights I was absolutely mad. I wish I was dead; I was once as much at your Disposal as you now are at his; and had you shown half the Resolution then, that you do now, none of this had happened.

Betty: Had you then told me your Intention of Marriage I had shown the same Resolution by saying I was your Wife; That you knew, and therefore would not trust me with your Scheme, but assured

me it was only a pretended Courtship to deceive the World, which you would break off as you had done others. I expressed great Uneasiness even at this; and you protested if I proclaimed my Marriage you would leave me and never see me more.

Mr C: I did say so, but should have acted otherwise.

Mr Lee: How the Devil should she know that?

Mr C: Pray Betty, let me talk with you for a Moment?

Mr Lee: She may be with you alone, if she pleases, but if she is, she must absolutely resign me.

Mr C: Then I don't desire it.

Betty: Speak with you alone! No, nothing but the express Desire of Mr Lee shall make me do it. If you would prove your Regard for me, do that Thing which alone can make me happy. The Terms were your own; I quitted you on your last Marriage and you offered me that Estate; confirm that Gift and give me a Release.

Mr C: You were always my Heir; and on my second Marriage I did promise you Sidbury Estate and would give it to you if you remained single; but I will not augment your Fortune a Shilling to marry another Man.

Mr Lee: She is single nor do I believe has any Intention of marrying; Therefore no Alteration of Circumstance can make your Promises void. It is needless to talk any more. You have rejected our Proposals and another Remedy must be taken.

Mr C: I should be very glad to meet you alone about it.

Mr Lee: All Expressions between us should be absolutely clear. What do you mean by offering to meet me alone? Is it to attempt settling this Affair? If it is, be convinced that (if I have any Interest) it shall be settled on no other Terms but those I have proposed. Or is our Meeting to be on another Account? If it is we should speak plainly; I believe few Civilities will pass between us; by God, I have no good Wishes towards you and I verily believe your Regard for me is not greater. Tell me therefore, what do you propose by this Conference?

Mr C: Possibly we may settle it; but if you don't choose to meet me alone, Fred shall be by.

Mr Lee: It is indifferent to me whether our Meeting is with or without Fred. No other Terms will ever be complied with; and so long as you refuse those, no Meetings will be efficacious; even the present Meeting has answered no End.

Mr C: To you perhaps it may not, but it has convinced me of two Things, which till now I had been in Doubt of; and I am sure you can't now tell, whether if you could prove against me all you desire to prove, it would be Joy or Grief to me.

Mr Lee: The Opinions of Men are so egregiously different that it is certainly impossible to know whether any Accident will be the Occasion of Joy or Grief; yet on many Occasions, as on this, we give very shrewd Guesses.

Mr Cresswell, you would by these dubious Expressions make us think you really love Miss Scrope; but whatever our Opinions are, these doubtful Expressions of yours will not alter them. I verily believe that at one Time you wished her to marry; and at that Time, had these Obstacles not intervened, I was resolved to marry her; If you thought she deceived me and wished it to be, you should not have over-shot the Mark and failed by using improper Methods, in doing which you went directly contrary to your own Wishes.

Mr C: I don't understand you.

Mr Lee: I thought my Expressions were clear and intelligible; Your asking me to repeat them makes me suspect some bad Design in the Request.

Mr C: I believe your Expressions are very clear and intelligible and that the Fault was in my Comprehension; for indeed my Head is so confused I scarce understand or know what I say myself.

Mr Lee: I had no premeditated Scheme of what I should say to you, therefore speak only the present Thought, which dies at the Utterance, as did this, for I really don't remember it.

Mr C: Well I don't desire a Repetition.

Here, wrote Betty, they had some discussion about the Note, the Farms that were in her grandmother's hands and other things relating to her want of money 'of no Consequence to mention'.

Mr C: I fancy my Staying longer will not be agreeable as we cannot settle Anything.

Mr Lee: I believe it will not be of any Signification.

Mr C: Betty, your Servant. Fred, do you go with me?

Fred: No. I dine with my Sister.

Mr C: Your Servant. I shall see you this Evening.

'Fred's continued Intimacy,' wrote Betty, 'troubled me very much. I expostulated very strongly with him upon the Appearance his Behaviour would have in the World to my Prejudice. He again promised to see him no more.'

Fred's letter to the cousin he had known all his life:

Sir

I have been all this Morning with my Sister and Mr Lee and have had the state of the Case laid open to me; which I find so contrary to your State of it, that I do from this Time determine to see you no more, unless with my Brothers and Mr Lee. The Injuries received by my poor Sister can never be got over by

Fred J. Scrope.

Lee's letter to Mrs Warneford, bringing her into the picture, was dispatched about the middle of May 1747 and caused a

great commotion at Bibury, arriving by express in the middle of the night. When her son-in-law arrived Mrs Warneford asked him point-blank whether he was married to Miss Scrope. He told her he was, but that it could not be proved and related the story 'in a short manner'.

But, said Mrs Warneford, a point of conscience now arose and so they deferred to a neighbour, a very worthy clergyman, for advice. He asked if they took him as attorney or divine and said that as an attorney he thought the Cresswells might live together, but as a divine he produced some texts from scripture.

Cresswell reproduced an argument he had used to Mrs Warneford and further said his marriage to Betty had never been meant.

The clergyman replied that it was not right for people to put their own meaning on words and to equivocate and asked the determination of lawyers on Roman Catholics so doing with oaths.

There it ended, for Mrs Warneford could not speak for her daughter's conscience, though she fancied if any divine thought she lawfully might continue to live with her husband, she would.

From Bibury Tom Cresswell went to Sidbury—for open war was now declared—to persuade his grandmother to return and live with him at Pinkney, 'to prevent their squandering any more of her Substance, to persuade her to alter her Will, and possibly on Terms to have resigned her again'. On his way, whilst ruminating, it came to him that possibly Betty was not married to Lee and did not design so doing. His guess was right, but she was completely in his power.

Poor old Grannie was told their story, which she had already heard 'in a slight manner' and immediately agreed to accompany him, but after talking with her maid Jenny she wavered. All the Scropes then wrote to her, also sent open letters to Mr Lee's steward for him to read to her, abusing Tom Cresswell and threatening never to see her again if she went to Pinkney; but finally she gave her consent and in the bustle of departure from Sidbury, poor old Mrs Huggeford her companion got left behind!

Anne Cresswell and her aunt Miss Sackville were at Pinkney and as soon as Lord Ducie returned home, Mrs Warneford joined them, it being nearer to Tortworth than was Bibury. He

and Mr S . . . arranged a meeting for them all at Pinkney to decide on what could be done for the best.

Tom Cresswell was very nervous.

> I being away from Home when they came, when I returned went to look for them, saw them at a Distance, advanced towards them, they retreated; I stood still till they came forward, then went to meet them.
>
> As soon as they were near enough, Lor Ducie asked me if I would promise for the Time to come that I would endeavour to be a good Husband if my Wife would live with me; but cautioned me to avoid Art and speak sincerely. His Hint about Art made me use this much; I told him it signified Nothing whether I would or would not, for my Wife would not live with me, her Conscience would not permit her, which amazed both him and Mr S . . . But after Dinner, when they discoursed the Affair before all the Women, they found it to be true.
>
> Yet Mr S . . . before he left Pinkney, told me I might live with my Wife if I pleased. Presently after my Mother and Aunt returned to Bibury. My Mother desired me not to behave more kind to my Wife than usual, for that would be barbarous, saying she could not then leave me, the Measles being at Bibury.

His wife, though she scolded sometimes, was behaving better than ever before, obviously glad to be quit of Betty and although still hoping for a separation, relieved not to have been renounced; but her complacency was all too soon to be shattered by the cruel personal references that would be published in the narratives.

After another visit to London where he again failed to secure a meeting with Betty, Cresswell went back to Bibury to confer with Mrs Warneford, about articles of separation, who asked him what allowance he proposed; and said her daughter might stay as long as she pleased and would be a very good boarder, but could not move while the measles were at Bibury.

He proposed £400; but Mrs Warneford's adviser, Mr B., said it was the opinion of the world that he should allow his wife the whole income she had brought and so this was agreed and Mr Ready was instructed to draw up the articles.

A date was fixed for them to be signed and Tom Cresswell again went to Bibury, where after 'some squabbling' between his mother and himself about his total resignation of Bibury estate, and his assigning over his son absolutely to trustees to educate as they pleased without interference, both which 'unreasonable

demands' he refused, they came to the following agreement. That articles of separation should be drawn to take place when he and his wife agreed to it. That these articles should not affect their marriage articles, but each retain their rights; that his wife should be empowered to leave a will; and have the benefit of the parson's annuity from the previous February; also her jewels and all the plate and furniture that she brought; and the coach and a pair of horses.

Cresswell returned to Pinkney that night, not having been asked to stay.

As was to be expected, when Mr Ready sent the articles for perusal they were not what had been agreed so yet again Tom Cresswell went to Bibury, to give his reasons for not signing them.

His wife, who had been to Bibury to visit her mother, had told him the reason she had not asked him to stay on the previous occasion was a report, spread by Scrope and Lee, that he had attempted to persuade Fred to go to bed with her so that he could go in and catch him, taking occasion thence to turn her out of doors—the whole being contained in a letter to which he had replied.

In his own vindication he now told the tale as it really was, 'but could hardly get credit'. Even the 'real tale' was less than complimentary to his wife!

Presently Mrs Warneford's adviser, Mr B., reappeared and was told the story and shewn the letters, whereupon he said with great concern:

> I will tell you Mr Cresswell what the World says as to the Scruple of Conscience; the major Part are of Opinion that a moral Certainty is Conviction enough; the other think Nothing but a legal Certainty sufficient Conviction, because were any less esteemed so, it would be in the Power of any Man to part with his Wife when he pleased.

A few days later at Pinkney matters were brought to a head. Cresswell asked his wife to stay a little in the parlour after his grandmother went to bed; told her the possibility that he and Betty might one day or another live together, unless she married Lee; asked her 'in a fond and endearing Manner' if none the less she would live with him as his wife, telling her if she then refused, never thereafter to reproach him; she refused. . . .

Lately my Wife has behaved to me in a more obliging Way than ever she did in her Life and possibly would not be sorry to live with me as a Wife; But I think we had better not try again; for though perhaps we might at first agree well enough, I am sure it would not last and that it will be better for us both to separate.

Though she is a religious, virtuous Woman, frugal enough and as to her own Person quite parsimonious, no Lover or Frequenter of Publick Places, and never once in any Matter of Consequence disobeyed, and when I was from Home, ever did the Things she thought I should have done, had I been at Home,—Yet her Tongue, her provoking and constantly employed Tongue, would certainly rob me of all Ease and Comfort in Life.

Tired of the Way of Life she was in and thinking all Delays concerning the Articles of Separation proceeded from me, she scolded me heartily about it.

In a Day or two after Mr Ready came, the Articles were executed and we are separated.

Happiness was of course the charm that so improved Anne Cresswell's behaviour. Her husband had never been more than a disagreeable necessity, freedom lay ahead and a pleasant life in her old home, with her children, whose birth had secured the future of Bibury. The second child, a little girl named Frances, had been born about this time.

If matters could have rested there, the scandal would soon have died down, and after a decent interval everyone could have been happy. The cousins would have come together, Betty would have had her beloved Sidbury, and their story would never have come down to posterity. But that was not the design in the web of their fortune, and the spider was Lancelot Lee.

Betty in her prim style gave details of their domestic arrangements in London.

At the desire of her brothers she left her first lodgings on account of their smallness. They and Mr Lee thought it most convenient to eat with her and make a weekly purse for that purpose, as a less expense to them all. For this reason they took lodgings at the house of one Mrs Peterson, next door to the Cocoa Tree in Pall Mall. . . .

I never once to the best of my Remembrance dined or supped with Mr Lee alone; he never came to me in the Morning before ten, nor ever once stayed after my Brothers in the Evening.

She mentions a 'trifling Dispute' about some table linen and a 'very warm quarrel' with her previous landlady, about carrying out of the house a young girl, who was with her, dangerously ill with the smallpox.

> In July Mr Lee and my Brothers were very anxious to leave Town and a Day was fixed, but unfortunately a Girl I had with me was taken with the Smallpox and I could not leave her under a Week or Ten Days.
>
> My Brothers Scrope and Tom went to Lincoln, Mr Lee and Fred stayed in Town. We intended setting out as soon as possible and my Brother promised to meet me at Bridgnorth, where I designed staying only to get my Things from Sidbury and then going to Lincoln.
>
> They had not left me three Days when Mr Cresswell returned. He came directly to my Lodgings, thence to Mr Lee's and at Dinner time sent a letter to Fred.

This confirms Cresswell's own account. His letter was from 'the Sun Tavern, the Corner of the Street that Mr Willis the Apothecary lives in'. It drew a blank and next day he sent his attorney, Mr Witts, to call and Betty again reported the interview verbatim in her vivid way.

> Betty: Mr Cresswell is in Town is he not?
>
> Mr Witts: Yes, Madam, I just came from him and should be glad to speak with you in private for two or three Minutes.
>
> Betty: [who evidently had a Companion] If you please you may walk into this Room; but if your Business is from Mr Cresswell there is no Need of Privacy. This Lady and indeed the whole Kingdom is acquainted with it.
>
> Mr Witts: My Business is from Mr Cresswell; he desires to see you alone.
>
> Betty: I will not see him. I would as soon see the Devil.
>
> Mr Witts: I hope not. Mr Cresswell believes if he could speak with you, Matters might be settled amicably; that he might live with you, parting from the other Woman, which indeed he always intended.
>
> Betty: No, it is impossible he can think of that and if it should be so, I would certainly get a Divorce.
>
> Mr W: Madam that can't be.
>
> Betty: I know the contrary; Mr Cresswell says I am his Wife; Should that appear I can most certainly prove his living in Adultery.
>
> Mr W: Oh, Madam, is it not better to live with him peaceably, than be forced?

Betty: I know I can't be forced. Mr Witts if you will stay a little I will send for Mr Lee.

Mr W: Madam, I had rather be excused. I have no Commission to him. I will go and tell Mr Cresswell what you say, whose Desire to see you is so great that he will even submit to Mr Lee's being present, rather than not see you at all.

Betty: He will not be permitted to see me, with or without Mr Lee, but on the Terms he knows.

[Here, Betty gave Mr Witts a short account of the injuries she had received, at which the worthy man was so shocked that he dropped tears, and said:]

Mr W: It is bad indeed, very bad, and I can say Nothing in vindication of Mr Cresswell.

Betty: Here is Mr Lee coming. This is Mr Witts, who is come to me with a Message from Mr Cresswell.

Mr Lee: I am surprised that Mr Cresswell trifles so much in an Affair of so great Consequence. I do not in any Degree doubt his Villainy, but really I always thought him a Man of Sense; and yet in this he acts contrary to that Character. He knows our Proposals from which we have not once deviated. Can he not tell whether he will or will not comply?

Mr W: He wants to speak with Madam Cresswell alone.

Mr Lee: I believe he does, but what End can it answer? She is at her own Disposal and will act as she thinks proper.

Mr W: I hope she will see him.

Betty: I will not.

Mr Lee: Indeed, Mr Witts, it will be to no Purpose.

Mr W: You can't tell.

Mr Lee: Could you guess what Usage she has received from him, you would not wish she should see him. Believe me he could not have employed any other Man to whom we could have spoke on this Subject; I have ever heard you represented as a Man of great Integrity and Honesty, therefore we listen to you. Ready was here on the same Errand and our Determination was not to suffer him to speak on this Subject.

Mr W: I am much obliged to you Sir, for your good Opinion.

Mr Lee: Sir, I have my whole Life wished to be a Friend to Miss Scrope: Ten Years ago I courted her; Cresswell, fearing my Advances engaged her. Some Years afterwards, supposing her single, my Affection still remaining, I renewed my Addresses. He disappointed me. She told me the Reason. I cannot now be the Lover, from that Hope I am entirely cut off unless he dies; and the Instant that happens and she consents, I will marry her. Till then I will do her all the Service I can. My Fortune and my Life shall be devoted to her.

Mr W: I wish Madam Cresswell would see him. If she does not, all

will be up. He will be prosecuted and torn to Pieces. His only Remedy will be to leave the Kingdom.

Mr Lee: Thank God. The Kingdom will be rid of a Knave * * * * * * * * [six lines of asterisks].

Mr W: I am sorry Things go so ill. I see Nothing but Ruin. For God's Sake, Madam, hear his Proposals.

Mr Lee: No, it can be to no Purpose. We can meet but on two Occasions. The first on proposed Terms, the other to cut one another's Throats, which I don't desire to do.

Mr W: Consider, Sir, how many People a publick Prosecution will make unhappy. Perhaps a Meeting may prevent that. Mr Cresswell and Madam may be reconciled.

Betty: I will die first. If I could forgive his other Injuries, I could not attempt to hurt my Reputation by saying I knew of his Marriage and consented to it, for which he is a Villain.

Mr W: Indeed, Madam, I don't believe he ever said so.

Mr Lee: I am sure he said it.

Mr W: Upon my Soul, he never said it to me.

Mr Lee: Well, Mr Witts, upon your Account, thus far will I concede. Let him in writing make his Proposals which I will read over. He once before offered Mr Scrope a Paper containing the Whole between himself and Miss Scrope, on condition he would immediately after reading it return it, without suffering a Copy to be taken. Mr Scrope very prudently refused to receive it on those Terms, nor will I. [The paper referred to was Cresswell's narrative, subsequently published.] Whatever he sends, I will keep. * * * * [six lines expunged] he is afraid to give any writings, lest being convicted of perpetual Contradictions he should never be believed. If he dares write, I will give his Paper the reading.

Betty: Upon my Word, Mr Witts, I dare not see him for Fear he should murder me * * * *

Mr W: Indeed, It is very bad; God forbid that I should press a Thing that might be attended by such fatal Consequences; but, supposing Sir, I should by Word of Mouth bring you any Proposals from him?

Mr Lee: It would be much more effectual in writing. Will you answer that he shall comply with any Proposal that you bring? There is no Dependence on any Thing he says. I have no Objection to talking with you, but it will be doing Nothing but losing Time in sending Messages backwards and forwards.

Mr W: Well, I am very sorry. Madam Cresswell your Servant, Sir, etc.

Betty: In the Afternoon Mr Witt's came to us at my Brother Fred's where we dined. Mr Lee asked whether he had any written Proposal from Mr Cresswell?

Mr Witts: No, he will not write anything but asks to see Madam Cresswell.

Betty: I will not see him.

Mr W: But dear Madam, consider; is it not better to do this quietly than by Force? He is determined to part with his other Wife and own his Marriage with you, in which Case you will be forced to live with him; and then how miserable your Life will be. You must never see any of your Friends unless Mr Cresswell pleases and Mr Lee can never come to you then.

Mr Lee: Is that his Design? Well, there appears some Reason to it. I am very glad to hear it. This would have been the End of our Prosecution; the whole Expense and Trouble of it will be saved if he claims her as his Wife. We shall have no Trouble on our Hands after, but to get a Divorce.

Mr W: No, Sir, that will be impossible.

Mr Lee: No, No, indeed it will not; But no Matter whether it is or no, if this is his Intention there is no Occasion for his Entreaty to see her. He may command it. She has ever been a most unfortunate Woman, inured to Afflictions; I wish he may claim her, all Methods then shall be tried for Divorce; if that fails I know that her Religion and Virtue will enable her to support a State of so much Misery.

Mr W: But, surely they may be reconciled? I live and wish them both well.

Mr Lee: It is impossible. Her Abuses have been of too deep a Nature.

Mr W: Let her Sufferings be ever so great, she must, if Mr Cresswell pleases, live with him. Suppose I was now come in Mr Cresswell's Name to bring her to him, she could not refuse going; nor would you dare to keep her by Force.

Mr Lee: You would most certainly find that we should. If Mr Cresswell prove his Marriage, indeed None would dare to detain her, otherwise every Friend she has would do it.

Mr W: I may in Mr Cresswell's Name come and take her without any previous Demand; but I hope all Things may yet be made up quietly.

Mr Lee: I must laugh at this Scheme. But it will not do Mr Witts, he will not claim her or send you, but will certainly be prosecuted by us.

Mr W: What Sir, you will prosecute him for Bigamy?

Mr Lee: That we shall most certainly, unless he prevents us by claiming her.

Mr W: You can't hurt him so deeply as you imagine. He will be tried, perhaps convicted, but the Punishment is trifling and the Consequence, Madam Cressswell must live with him. For you Madam, you must not be surprised if Tomorrow I come in Mr Cresswell's Name to claim you as his Wife.

Mr Lee: The latter Scheme is good; but in Truth Mr Witts, I think Bigamy is a monstrous Crime; and should esteem the Punishment

inflicted by the Law in that Case as a glaring Mark of Infamy.
Mr W: Oh no, it is trifling; besides a Man cannot easily be convicted. I myself once defended a Man that had seven Wives!

Here [wrote Betty] we were interrupted by a Message from Mr Cresswell to Mr Witts, desiring his Company. Little more was said except declaring our fixed Resolution of not seeing him.

It was now August 1747.

No more was heard from Cresswell, and Betty with Fred and Mr Lee set out for Bridgnorth where they were joined by Scrope, who went on with Fred and Lee to Coton. Betty remained in Bridgnorth where she was soon favoured by a visit from Mrs Lee, Lancelot's mother, who showed concern for her sufferings, expressed satisfaction at her son's attachment and was full of excuses that she had not the opportunity of offering part of her house, but having only just come 'she had only one bed for herself and Miss Bet' (her youngest child).

Betty went to great pains in her book always to emphasize the circumspection of her behaviour. She did not want to be compromised into matrimony. Mrs Lee now chaperoned her whenever she went to Coton and their second stay was a long one.

Betty: At this Time I received a Letter from my Sister filled with Complaints of the Smallness of her House, Want of Beds, Inconvenience of Company while she lay in etc., all which appeared to me as so many Hints that my Absence might very well be dispensed with.

Perhaps my Resentment might be too quick and what was so cutting in my distressed State might at another Time have passed unregarded; but mine was a well-grounded Jealousy; the Invitation last year was just such another, impossible to be accepted.... I determined not to go to my Sister's but was still anxious to live at Lincoln; and much more so as Mr Lee desired it. [As inaccessible to his rival.]

We pressed my Brother Scrope to let me be with him: he consented, only objected that he should be sometimes absent, when I must take Care to provide for myself, but to make it easy he would leave the Servants at Board Wages.

This pleased me and I determined going in October. I could not set out with my Brother, so Fred promised to come at the appointed Time and conduct me. Thus were Things settled when they left us, one going to Lincoln and the other to London. When we returned to Bridgnorth Mrs Lee very kindly pressed my coming to her House during my Stay, and for that Purpose borrowed a Bed from her Son.

It was necessary for Lee's plans to break up the house-party at Coton. On 3rd October he was to launch his public campaign with a long anonymous letter to the Press, which he followed up with another, even longer, signed by himself and addressed to Thomas Cresswell.

The reason for this extraordinary action was explained by a paragraph in Betty's book:

> We had the Opinions of several very eminent Lawyers concerning my unhappy Case. All agreed that it was impossible for our Marriage to be proved supposing the Clergyman was dead; and consequently not in my Power to distress Mr Cresswell, or in his to disturb me.

And Mr Lee was not going to let his enemy escape scot-free. The scandal in October became sensational. Everybody was shocked but diverted, and poor Betty bore the brunt. The publicity forced her cousin to publish his narrative in self-defence and give the whole story, and Lancelot Lee did not win the acclaim he had expected. The brothers were furious.

> Betty: Very soon after I had a Letter from my Brother [Scrope] warmly condemning my Stay in Bridgnorth and insisting upon my immediate Coming to Lincoln, but mentioned not his own house but only my Sister's. This was a very disagreeable State; I wished earnestly to go to Lincoln, only was resolved against going to my Sister's. This he knew, but pressed what I wished to do in such Terms as made my Compliance impracticable.
>
> I was ill and unable to write so Mr Lee answered the Letter, agreeing to the Necessity of my Going to Lincoln, but positively refusing that my Sister's should be the Place; and requested my Brother to receive me. But desired I might stay a Month to determine about an Answer to the Narrative, just then published....

The family felt it should close its ranks and were all exasperated by Betty's obstinacy, the scandal she had caused, and the way in which they had been misled. But now it did not suit Lee to let her go at once. He could not risk losing his influence until more sure of his ground.

The anonymous letter with which Lancelot Lee broached his campaign was published in the *General Evening Post* of 3rd October 1747.

The story was arranged to suit his purpose, which was—so it

was thought—to infuriate Mrs Warneford into prosecuting her son-in-law. Lee himself had no status, and Scrope no case, and their object could thus be achieved and without expense.

He showed Betty no mercy and despite his declarations may have been resentful that she would not marry him. Had she done so in the previous winter when he was at Sidbury, her grandmother would surely have made her a marriage settlement.

The letter began with the statement that Mr C . . . a young gentleman of some fortune in the west of the kingdom, having settled his affections on a young lady named S . . . and meeting with a mutual return, could not be 'easy till Hymen had tied the endearing knot and the Church had made them each other's'.

It remained secret for fear of disobliging a rich relation. . . .

After a considerable time a lady of large fortune, thinking C . . . single, gave him encouragement and C . . . was flattered, mentioned the affair to his wife 'who readily came into his base Design for living in Affluence by means of a second marriage' and to complete the treachery insinuated herself into the new Mrs C . . .'s friendship and was 'invited to live with her as a Friend and Companion and thus share her Husband'.

This travesty then introduced Mr L . . . as an honourable and worthy suitor who challenged C . . . sword in hand for making scandalous reflections on Miss S . . ., but 'big with the stinging Secret' could not help upbraiding her, whereupon she came out with the whole story to the astonishment of the deluded Mrs C . . . 'who bore the most violent conjugal love for her betrayer'.

The letter ended:

> How far the Laws or the Highest Authority in the Land can redress her or provide for the innocent Babes (who are not entitled to the Reversion of her estate) I cannot tell.

The ground thus prepared, an even longer letter was published in the *General Evening Post* of 31st October, signed this time by Lancelot Lee, dated Coton 17th October 1747, and addressed personally to Thomas Cresswell Esq. at Pinkney near Malmesbury, Wilts.

It began:

> Sir
>
> At my Request Mr Scrope told you by Letter that in a Month

> or six Weeks you should hear from me in the Publick Papers. Your Answer treated this Message as a Threat only....

He then went through their quarrel and the whole story in detail, step by step, from 1737 when he had first visited Sidbury, intending—so he said—to propose marriage but had been rebuffed by their grandmother.

He confessed to the public without shame that at the time of the measles he had advised Betty to keep all her letters and to encourage more as they would prove useful, and he gave their 'Terms' and said that when they had written to Mrs Warneford everything was ready for a prosecution, adding:

> I never speak of you to any but as the worst of Men; if I speak falsely acquit yourself as publickly as I accuse you; if you do not, None will believe any Calumny you cast upon me, but Knaves and Fools. The bad Opinion of such is Praise not Condemnation.

His letter flowed on and on—published later in book form, it comprised sixteen pages.

The day they had dined at Mr Frederick Scrope's in London, Cresswell had written 'a foolish insolent letter' which 'affected style' could not hide his distress—then had come the attorney's visit—'Everything I said of you to him was true—what I said was as bad as could be said of Man' (hence the asterisks indicating censorship in Betty's verbatim account of that interview)!

Next came a wrangle over the Sidbury estate books which Lee had refused to let Betty hand over to Cresswell's agent, neither had he let her see the man. His arrogance is astonishing but the collection of barbs, taken from what his rival had thought to be private letters, showed him to have been more hurt than he cared to own—'but the Don Quixote Lee, who has captivated the Hearts and the Understanding of your whole Family, would not permit it, that he might appear the Hero of the most trifling Novel'.... (A reference to the Lady of Shropshire's recent publication.)

Lee poured out his rancour to the public—'I detest you: and as a publick Violater of the most sacred and social Laws, my Duty to Mankind obliges me to bring you to Infamy and Punishment.'

He ended with a long Biblical quotation and a postscript:

> P.S. Mr Cresswell never shall have any letter from me unsigned; nor shall I look on anything anonymous as coming from him; Such belong to Nobody; They are like Assassins in a dark Night, wounding him they dare not attack in the Light.

This extraordinary public letter from a young man of twenty-eight caused a great stir, and it becomes crystal clear why the young Lee's personality had failed in earlier years to commend itself to old Mrs Cresswell and her friends; why the Scrope brothers did not like him; and why poor Betty, though wholly subjugated to his influence, could yet not manage to love him.

Thomas Cresswell took a week to digest Lee's bombshell and the *General Evening Post* published his reply, dated 7th November on 12th November 1747. Addressed to Lancelot Lee Esq. at Coton in Shropshire, it began:

> Sir
>
> The Reasons you give in your Letter to me for publishing it in the General Evening Post, are lest the World should think you notoriously blameable because we speak against each other in the most virulent Manner; to bring me to Infamy and Punishment; and to prevent my doing any more Mischief.
>
> Whether these are the true ones and how they will answer the several Ends proposed, Time will best discover.

He proceeded to take Lee's letter point by point and demolish it on a note of contempt:

> You know your Letter to Mrs Warneford is almost one continued Lye: What Business you had to disturb the Peace of my Wife's Family, I know not: I suppose you are sufficient of yourself to relieve the Oppressed....
>
> I gave Miss Scrope free leave to marry you, expected she would have done so, and why she did not I can't tell....
>
> 'Tis easier to say 'I will prove a Thing' than to do it, I defy you....
>
> Whether you are a Man or not is of no Consequence to me; you have in my Opinion injured me and have been the Cause of much Uneasiness to the Woman you pretend to esteem, much more than ever she would have known had she never seen you, nor you pretended to redress her Wrongs.

Outsiders now joined in the fray. A bystander from Malmesbury published a letter to Lee in the newspaper issued 24th November 1747.

Sir

I have read over your Letter and Mr Cresswell's Answer in the General Evening Post: But while one of you asserts he can prove a previous marriage and the other desires him to do it, a Stranger must remain ignorant of the Truth thereof, until a legal Proof is made. However please give me leave to make a Remark or two: You say in your Letter that it is most notoriously false that Mr Cresswell married his present Wife with Miss Scrope's Consent.... It is well known in this Neighbourhood and it can be proved, that Miss Scrope first proposed the Match; that she was present when Mr Cresswell first proposed it; that she lived in the same House with him, knew of the whole Courtship which was carried on publickly, and was acquainted with the Time when that Marriage was to be solemnised and after it was over, she went in Person to pay a Visit to Mrs Cresswell to congratulate her upon that Occassion.... Let the World judge if these Circumstances do not prove the Consent both before and after Marriage....

It was a painful and calamitous position to which Lancelot Lee had brought the girl he professed to love, the innocent Bibury family, and all the Scrope brothers. The bystander continued to enlarge upon Betty's reprehensible behaviour if she was really married, in permitting bigamy, quoted Lee's extravagant letter and added:

And yet, Sir, you are become her Hero: think it incumbent upon you to see those Injuries redrest, which if they are real, have been occasioned through her own Fault!—have not only expressed the highest Opinion of her Merit, but even admire and love her almost to Distraction.... You say that at your Request and for the Sake of the other Woman, upon a bare Release from Mr Cresswell, Miss Scrope would have been silent and would have stopped Proceedings; but that afterwards, a bare Release would not be accepted as sufficient Redress without Terms.

You have given no Reason why Terms came to be insisted upon; nor have you explained what those Terms were; But Mr Cresswell seems to insinuate that it was expected of him that he should give up his Estate at Sidbury to Miss Scrope, that she might marry you.

The Value of the Estate I am told is about £500 a year. If so large an Addition of Fortune had been made to that Lady's great Merit, it is probable that she would not on that account have appeared less amiable to you; But whether in that Case you would have been content to engage her only and would have had Patience enough to have waited till after Mr Cresswell's Death, (who appears to be as good a Life as your own) or whether you would have married her sooner, must be left to you to determine; But the great

Difficulty with me is as to the Legality of the Agreement proposed.

For my own Part I confess I am not Lawyer enough to know how such a Release is to be drawn, whereby a Man can quit all Right to his Wife. Such a Discovery will not only be curious, but for ought I know some Men may find it useful. Nor am I better satisfied how a Femme covert can release her Husband so as to bar all future Claim (for I take it for granted that those Releases were to be mutual) unless she can levy a Fine upon her Husband in due Form of Law and declare the Uses of him to be for the second Wife. Nor does your Scheme for stopping the Proceedings seem to be better founded; for supposing you could have prevailed on Mr Cresswell by Threats or otherwise, to have conveyed unto Miss Scrope the Estate mentioned, could she have done any valid Act to have prevented a renewal of those Proceedings whenever she thought proper, unless she had been married to you or some other Person?

Such a Scheme seems plain calculated to get Money and must make a Cause suspected and have but a very bad Appearance amongst all impartial Persons. . . .

The letter continued in the same vein, pointing out difficulties and concluded:

Please Sir, to indulge me with one Question more, out of mere Curiosity only, and I have done.

Since Miss Scrope is in Possession of a handsome Fortune of her own and has one Brother who is possessed of a very large Estate and another Brother who is bred up to the Law, why do you concern yourself so much in this Cause, if you are to receive no particular Benefit from it?

Lancelot Lee was not to be drawn by an anonymous letter. He replied in lofty terms, challenging the author to reveal himself. 'Act like a Man. Reprint and sign your Letter; the Particulars of which shall be minutely answered by me, that is only amused by Echoes.'

But the fat was in the fire and to prevent any further public participation in the affair, Cresswell decided to submit the truth, and published his narrative, although he did so with mixed feelings, seeing no other way out of the web in which they were all now entangled.

He addressed himself to Gervase Scrope and began with a preface:

Though it is impertinent to trouble the Publick with my private Affairs, yet I thought myself under a Necessity of publishing the

following Sheets in order to take off part of that Load of Infamy that has been laid upon me and industriously propagated by those I did not expect it from; Yet, not content with that, I have since been attacked in an open Manner by Lancelot Lee, who I thought was no more concerned than the Queen of Spain; but he may for private or particular Reasons be fond of showing what he is capable of.

My Design is to relate Truth and plain Matters of Fact; by which it will appear I am culpable in some Things (as what Man is there that is not) yet I deserved not that base and scandalous Treatment I have met with.

I wrote this on first hearing of the monstrous Crimes I was being charged with, which I hope will palliate for that Warmth of Expression that discovers itself.... I told Gervase Scrope my Design, wished him to ask me not to do it; he defied me; yet I published not nor ever should have (because I am forced to introduce private Conversations and the Names of many worthy Persons) but through the Persuasions of some Friends, who were of the Opinion that Lee's Letter made it absolutely necessary....

There followed an Address to G . . . S . . . Esq.

To your eternal Shame and Confusion and of your Brother Fred's, L...'s and your Sister Elizabeth S... I publish this true State of the Case between her and me.

If you think I have injured your Sister, be yourself that noble Gentleman my Love once thought you and seek to redress her Wrongs by Ways becoming a Man and a Gentleman and cease publishing Things that you all know are Lies, Defamation and Slander, as the following Narrative shall make appear.

Your Brother Tom, as a Man of Honour scorns such Actions; to him as such, after expressing a proper Disdain for an insignificant Threat, I referred myself at the Beginning, but being refused I refer myself to the Publick.

Tom Scrope's refusal to get involved had cost his sister dear. It is not clear whether the Scropes believed in Lee or considered him a maniac beyond control. Certain it is that he had them on a string through their fear that he might abandon their sister and they all longed for her to retire into the respectable oblivion of matrimony. The narrative finished with another long and impassioned speech to Gervase:

Having finished this long, tedious and to all but the Concerned, most trifling Tale, which you have forced me to make publick by your Family's utter Refusal of seeing me, unless I will entirely give your Sister an Estate worth between Thirteen and Fourteen Thousand

Pounds, together with your publishing a false Tale in the General Evening Post.

No Man more strenuously ever endeavoured to gain any Point than I have done, to be admitted in a private Manner to attempt to justify myself to you and your Family, but all in vain. Nay, even since this has begun to be printed, I told you by Letter I would not publish it if you desired the contrary; but the Reverse appearing I am willing the World shall judge.... It has been declared by you and in the most publick Manner that I, by great Labour and Assiduity, debauched your Sister, then married her; next attempted to poison her with Laundanum; afterwards married my Present Wife unknown to her; then persecuted her with my Company and by Lies and Slander prevented her marrying Lancelot Lee Esq., a Gentleman of great Parts, large Estate etc. and entered into a Conspiracy with Fred that he should get into Bed with my Wife....

Cresswell then reminds his cousin that he had called him mad for saying he fancied they did not know the true state of things ... and he goes on to relate some intimate love-making conversations between Betty and himself :

Such as these were all our latter Conversations whenever we were alone, therefore I avoided them; not that I pretend to boast more Continence or Chastity than other Men; I ever indulged all my Passions, which undoubtedly was the Reason why at that Time I had not any greater Liking to your Sister than to other Women; therefore would not lie with a Girl whose Welfare I would have as industriously promoted as you or any of her Brothers; I say 'would not' though I had it in my Power to have done it any Day for Years, for she never till lately scrupled being with me alone, in any Place or any Manner.

Nothing but her violent and as I thought dangerous Illness, and being invited into her Bed made me then do it, on the ridiculous Terms I have before mentioned ... neither had I then lain with her, let what would have been the Consequences, had she not agreed that I should marry another Woman. She consented that I should marry several, yet I never seriously set about it till I was sure she could bear it.

When I married Miss Warneford I loved her as well as I loved your Sister the Day before I went to Bed with her, and determined to make her a good Husband, not doubting that your Sister's Pride and Virtue when absent from me, would enable her to overcome her Passion; that she would reflect that it was impossible for us to live together publickly in England. But as I have observed, my Wife and I quarrelled soon after we were married because I did not go to Church with her twice, the first Sunday afterwards.... I began to

love your Sister, finding Ease with her and Uneasiness with my Wife....

Having now told you and the Publick the whole Truth, what am I to do and what do you expect?

Your Sister never having yet kept any Promise of Consequence she ever made me, has no Claim nor any well-grounded Expectancy that I should keep any; Yet was I sure that it was my Letters and not Lee's Fickleness and better Acquaintance with her that prevented their marrying, possibly I might do Something....

He finished with indignant complaints against her familiarity with Lee and the 'indecent way' she permitted him to behave. These exchanges were widely read and the publishers made capital from the story.

The three letters in the *General Evening Post* were bound into a booklet entitled:

THE MISERABLE EFFECTS OF GRASPING AT RICHES by any Unlawful or Unseemly Methods; exemplified in the melancholy and remarkable Instance of ANXIETY and DISTRESS at this TIME laboured under by some Persons, who once seemed by Nature formed for, and might have otherwise enjoyed, every Delight this Earth affords: With a Word of Advice to the interesting Parties in Relation to their future Conduct.... [A long homily followed.]

The story was in circulation even in the north, where an extract of it was given in the catalogue of a book store in Birmingham in 1749. The deplorable publicity ricocheted on until at last it was silenced by death.

The Cresswell-Scrope scandal was not of course the only one connected with Fleet marriages and in 1753 an Act of Parliament was passed forbidding the solemnization of any marriage without banns or a licence.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Conclusion of the Affair

LANCELOT LEE did not again appear in print, preferring to remain in the shadows, where he helped Betty with her reply, in which she included her cousin's letters, to his wrath and indignation—but to her further misfortune—for practically she denied very little and her book was eagerly read. Each volume was signed and numbered, the writer's copy being No. 893.

But first came Anne Cresswell's letter printed in the *British Magazine,* Vol. II 1747, page 575. Gone were the moderately good and amicable terms on which she and her husband had parted. She had been deeply hurt by his unkind references to herself and their married life in his candid narrative. The first part of her protest has already been given and since it is her only personal appearance on the stage, so to speak, its conclusion now follows :

> I had thought my wisest Step was to attempt to gain his Love; but alas! I erred. His Heart was irrevocably lost and my Endearments were but so many Provocations to him.
>
> O the Misery of that Woman whose Partner of her Bed doats on another! all Merits in such a Wretch are a Crime and all that can be done for Peace is to indulge the Man who loathes her in a sullen Indolence; but I knew not this until too late and as I had no other Object of Endearments, I hoped to move some Tenderness in him.
>
> How contrary alas! was the Effect. Yet as it was 'tis happy; for it is better sure to know the worst at once, than to live in eternal Dread of what at last must fall on us.
>
> By this, which was to him the severest of all Provocations, I discovered at length the Depth of all my Misery. I banished him my Bed, my Thoughts, my Sight, and I have recovered the poor Remains of my own Fortune; But what Reparation alas! is this, Sir, to me, for all that I have suffered, all that I have lost?

Doomed without a Crime to Misery, nay, to Infamy too; told that those dear Babes whom I conceived my lawful Children, the Heirs of my Estate, are born in Bastardy; and robbed of all that Store of Happiness I should have else enjoyed in one, whose Virtues were as conspicuous as the Vices of the Wretch my Mother chose for me.

Plundered of my Honour as well as of my Fortune, and even of my Name and Being; and yet the Authors of this Misery shall live and flourish; strange Neglect of our famed Laws.

The Wretch who to relieve the Necessities of a starving Family steals my Gloves or my Handkerchief, shall be doomed to Death with Infamy; while he who robs me of all, nay, of myself, and she who deaf to all Cries of Honour and of Conscience dares to help him, tho' herself the great Source of all the diatracting Consequences, shall laugh in Ease and Security—shall publish to the World the story of my Wrongs and while disputing their own Quarrel, shall think my Share of the Ruin too trivial to be worth even the lightest Regard.

Think not, Sir, because this Story of my Part in this unhappy Tragedy is related less harshly on my own Conduct than my abandoned Husband is pleased to represent it, that it is not less true for that.

I am alas! too deeply plunged in Sorrow to feign Circumstances; and as I entreat you to lay this before the World, I flatter myself that they will not lay the Blame of the Differences of our Accounts at my Door, but be satisfied that he who could do such Actions as he boasts of, could surely take Liberties with Truth in the relating of them.

I am Sir, your very humble Servant

Poor Mrs Cresswell! Worse was to come when Betty published the private letters without censoring even more hurtful remarks.

Perhaps the gentlemen felt a twinge of sympathy for the unworthy husband of one who so revelled in her misery, but their ladies' eyes were moist with compassion.

Meantime a wrangle was going on among the Scropes, clearly exasperated because Betty would neither join her sister in Lincoln, as her brothers wished, nor marry Lee.

The narrative had been published when 'at last' wrote Betty, her brother Scrope gave her the following invitation, of which she cut the first five lines in her usual way * * * *

* * * * was my Affairs now in the same Situation as when I offered you to live with me, there would be Nothing more agreable; but it is quite otherwise * * * * and sometime ago begged it of you as a Favour to be content with £4 per cent Interest on your Fortune, till I had some way got over my Difficulties; but you did not choose to

do it and I continued it at £5 rather than have any Uneasiness between us; This was at a Time when you little expected these Misfortunes and in itself indifferent to you whether I allowed you £5 per cent, though it was to me very inconvenient. * * * * If upon the whole you and I can agree upon Terms and you prefer my House to a Boarding one, you may depend upon every Thing else as if my House were your own; But even this is an Inconvenience to me, who being alone have Nothing to do but consult my own Humour, which I must entirely give up when you are with me; now I breakfast sometimes at nine, sometimes at twelve, and dine accordingly; these I must give up and conform to more Regularity & therefore confined.

I mention not these as desirous of making my receiving of you an Obligation, but only to remind you of the Inconveniences attendant thereon * * * *.

Betty: Even with this cold Invitation I determined to go, not that Choice but Force induced me. If my Brother had demanded twice my Fortune it would have been prudent in me to comply; but could I have thanked him for it or thought it a Kindness? I answered his Letter and I believe complained of the Unkindness, but did not refuse the Offer. In return I had two or three severe Letters and at last the following * * * * [seven lines cut].

Scrope: * * * * To give you your Board I cannot & to receive you now as a Boarder after what has passed, I am determined against; upon all accounts it would have been inconvenient, for I must have had housekeeping going on upon your account in my Absence, which indeed I now have, but that's easy enough. If you think proper to come to Lincoln you may stay with me one, two or three Months till you have provided yourself to your own Mind. * * * * [Six lines cut.]

Betty: This was a great Disappointment. I clearly foresaw the dreadful Inconvenience attending my Stay at Bridgnorth and therefore determined to desire my Brother Tom would let me be at Coleby; but this Scheme was likewise prevented. I could not expect him to comply unless moved by a very strong Sense of Pity. I received the following Letter, extremely kind, as almost all his have been:

Dear Sister

I am extreamely concerned at your Determination of not coming to Lincoln, which I cannot help saying was in a great Measure prevented by the unkind Behaviour of your Relations. I have continually blamed my Brother Scrope for his Behaviour to you and represented to him the Ill-effects such Behaviour to a Sister, under your uncommon Misfortunes, must have in regard to the Opinion the World must have of you.

That he has risked his Life in your Cause is most certain; But that you will say was done for the Sake of his own Honour.

You know his prevailing Passion, that has and always will influence his Actions; for the sake of a few Pounds he has shut his Doors upon you and by that done more Injury to his Character, in my Opinion, than ten Times the Expence would have done to his Fortune. It will be a continual Shame to me to see you so barbarously treated by your Relations. I wish I was in any settled Way that my Doors might be always opened to you. As to coming to Vivien's, I think you would be very mean-spirited to accept it on any Account. **** [Last paragraph of six lines cut.]

Betty: There was no longer a Possibility of my Going to Lincoln. The Censures of the World on my Stay at Bridgnorth determined me not to be hasty; my Brother Tom's Remonstrances might possibly with a little farther Reflection on my unhappy State, change my Brother Scrope's Sentiments. For this Reason I continued at Mrs Lee's till March. During my Stay the following Letters passed between Mr Cresswell and me. . . .

Mr Cresswell to Miss Scrope:

Betty

Our Grandmother dyed last Saturday of a Thrush, as the Doctors called it, after a Fortnight's Illness.

She continued sensible to the last. I am her sole Executor. She has left you £20 and what of her Cloaths you choose, besides her Watch and Dressing Plate.

She altered her Will about a Month before her Death, spoke to me about it every Day for a Week before it was done, but was more pressing the last three Days. After that the Affair was finished to her Satisfaction, she seemed quite easy and happy & Doubtless foresaw her approaching End, though None else thought it so near. I will send you a Ring.

The next letter was delivered by a tradesman's wife with instructions to Betty to burn it in front of her, after reading it. He had heard she was going to print and publish his letters and implored her not to do so:

. . . that I may not hereafter have anything to reproach myself with, but may say with Truth I did every Thing in my Power to save you. Sometime ago you sent me a Message that you desired nothing of me but what the Law allowed. I say to you, that if you publish my Letters, you shall not have any Thing from me but what the Law will give you—I am determined. I have taken some Pains since the Publick has been let into our Affair to know what different

> People, strangers to us, of good Understanding, thought of it and us. My Letters from London and Bristol say that you choose the worst part you could. . . .

She had made him unhappy . . . she had had her revenge . . . which he believed had cost her something for he was informed she was not altogether 'easy' despite the exquisite pleasure of his torment . . . what did she want to do now? He could not guess . . . but if she would burn the letter as directed he would write again. . . . 'I can't conceive why you and Lee direct your Grocer to demand Payment of me for Goods delivered for your Use. Adieu.'

Betty's reply shows that her mental state was now beyond all reason, though it is open to speculation whether Lee wrote it for her.

> If you will recant those foolish, false, but mischievous Lies in your Narrative and do either of the three following Things, I will not publish your Letters.
> 1. Own * * * * was your Wife before either myself or Miss Warneford and so free us both.
> 2. If this is not true, or you and she think it imprudent to own it, find out a Method to get me divorced from you.
> 3. If you don't like this, make all your Wives happy by generously leaving this World and seriously seeking your Fortune in the next; where I hope you will meet with None to make you so miserable as you have made me. . . .

How Satan must have rubbed his hands in glee whilst going to and fro in the Earth and walking up and down in it, watching the web of Calamity slowly being spun.

In January (1748) Cresswell tried again. Two messages were delivered asking her to see him. She replied 'Let me have your Scheme in a Letter . . . I will show it to Mr Lee, have his Opinion and burn it. . . .' He sent his steward again, but she returned an open note, that she would not see him. Now under an obligation to Mrs Lee as well as her son, she would not have dared to do so. Cresswell then wrote a long letter to Lee of which the first ten lines are censored * * * * He wanted to have her 'Determination' from her own mouth, a written one he was not so sure of . . . would rather see her without Lee. . . .

> If she sincerely desires it, will pursue my Scheme, apply to the Man I will recommend to her and if it does not answer, I solemnly promise that I will immediately seek my Fortune in the other World—so certain am I of its Success.... I know not what she means by saying she never deceived me in any one Print.... Has she printed anything or by reckoning herself part of you does she attribute your surprising Performance to herself * * * * [asterisks].

This letter was written from Sidbury. When Tom Cresswell got back to Pinkney he wrote yet another to Betty, which contains some intriguing passages. He took it for granted that Lee was supervising her book, tried to stop it, could not understand why she would not see him, and replied to a message apparently delivered to him by Thomas Child his steward :

> By the latter part of your Message that I had and wod make you miserable and Myself not very happy, I understood that You desired me not to prosecute you in the Commons, accordingly I have not.... I infinitely desire to make you happy.... If you design living with me, the sooner you come the better.... Mrs Warneford would do my Wife my Justice without Prosecution and all indifferent People wod think the better of you.... You told me you had never deceived me in Print, by which I understand that you own an Advertisement that was put in the London Evening Post last Octr. Signed M.S. signifying that I might depend on your entire Love and affection that all Things should soon be settled to my entire Satisfaction.
>
> Possibly you may think six Months soon, I am sure I do not.... I think it best and desire you to come here immediately. If ever you design living with me, I will endeavour to make all Things agreable to you and to make the remaining part of your Life as happy as I can.... I am very uneasy, can't support myself quite alone, No Mortal to converse with, Have so much Pity and Generosity as to tell me your Designs.

Betty took no notice, though 'he perpetually plagued her, all to no purpose'.

There is no indication in her book that she ever relented. But still she did not marry Lee, who was pressing her, maintaining it to be a sign of virtue to refuse a good match and remain single.

In March she had left Mrs Lee's house and taken one for herself in Bridgnorth, where she lived in proud independence of both the men in her life and devoted much print to emphasizing the circumspection of her behaviour with Mr Lee.

A last anguished letter is printed from her cousin, telling her

that he had seen his narrative freshly advertised for sale and knew not who had done it for he had withdrawn all the pamphlets remaining unsold, four months ago.

Betty did not reply. Perhaps she dared not since Lee was still in control. But even if she had wavered last October, hurt by Lee's public letters, the narrative published in November would have replenished the vials of her wrath. Nothing could be determined until her book was written and she devoted herself to an impassioned work of self-justification.

> Nothing [she wrote of her cousin] but absolute Compulsion can bring us together and from that I thank my God I am secure. Few Men so young have been so wicked.... Few Women meat with so compleat a Villain as Mr Cresswell; and still fewer with so amazingly sincere a Friend as Mr Lee. He must not condemn me for being cautious in Regard to his Proposal of Marriage. In Publick I will acknowledge what in private Nothing would have forced me to own, that consulting my own Opinion only, I would marry him: But I have been too wretchedly unfortunate to depend on that only, therefore will govern my Resolution by better Judgements.

In other words she did not want to.

She paid him a further tribute, which showed by inference that the general public did not share her esteem:

> Let them remember how they have treated and still continue to treat that one truly generous Man who, for no imaginable Reasons of Self-interest and very remote as well as precarious ones of any other Nature, has been my sole Aid and Support; to whom indeed I owe the Means of defending myself against the worst of Enemies and of Men; But let the Merit of his Conduct and the Necessity of my own be fairly canvassed in the following Relation.
>
> This small hint of my Gratitude I have with Difficulty obtained his Leave to express and shall for ever despise that low Censure or exalted Malice, which would render the Cause of its suspicious, and reduce me to sink the highest Obligations in the Fear of acknowledging them.

The great work was finished, signed and dated on 20th August 1748 and Lee saw to its printing and publication. The full title was:

> MISS SCROPE'S ANSWER TO MR CRESSWELL'S NARRATIVE
>
> Psalm IV. Verse 12: 'For it is not an open Enemy that hath done this Dishonour, for then I could have borne it.'

'—only to enrich a Name which such an Action would render infamous.' [Narrative, page 50.]

The Reply ended with a passionate speech :

I was Miss Scrope with the fairest of Characters, caressed by all my Acquaintance. My good God! What an unhappy Change! I now am Miss Scrope thought of by too many as presented in the Narrative—visited by hardly any of those who before industriously fought my Acquaintance—affronted frequently by People who suppose that Piece of Inhumanity a Proof of their own Virtue—My true Character known to but few; my bad Fame known perhaps as generally as that of a Woman of private Station can be. I am still within myself the same I ever was; easy, contented and (except in the Troubles I have fatally laid upon Mr Lee and my Brothers) happy:

The Want of Company is no Loss to me; but the Loss of my Reputation is indeed a grievous one and what I would have preserved at any virtuous Expence....

My Enemies can hurt me no farther and indeed PUBLICKLY they have succeeded but too well. THERE, Report alone is sufficient for Condemnation: PRIVATELY among my Neighbours they must fail: HERE or wherever I may after this Time live, my Manner of Life will destroy any Report to my Discredit.

Though till now I have made no publick Defence, yet some Friends have warmly defended my Cause. Such have my sincere Thanks. I hope my future Behaviour will confirm their Esteem; and they with the Rest of my Judges to whom I have appealed, will now know what they only believed before, the Innocence of their obliged

(signed) Elizi. Scrope.

Having 'found a theory on which to justify herself' let us be glad 'she slept in Peace', for judging by a review she derived no other benefit. Her work revived the controversial scandal and the letters published to annoy, demonstrated her cousin's remorse and the persistence with which he still sought to make amends. She remained a bone of contention between the two men, either of whom could have married her in earlier years without publicity.

The two pamphlets of the narrative and the answer were bound together in a book for R. Baldwin Jun. in Paternoster Row in 1749 and were widely circulated.

Mr Lee was now awkwardly, even ludicrously, placed. He had promoted a wicked and slanderous campaign, causing innocent people much unhappiness and had accomplished nothing but the ruin of his lady, without winning her hand; increasingly it looked as though his real object had been the acquisition of Sidbury.

What Thomas Cresswell's final plan was will never be known. After their grandmother's death he could have made over Sidbury on condition Betty did not marry Lee; Scrope could have 'commanded' acceptance. The months drifted by and some such family arrangement was Lee's nightmare, when suddenly the whole affair was dramatically resolved.

There was a disastrous fire and Sidbury Hall, the moated house with its long history, full of memories and relics of the past, restored with such loving care after the Civil War, was now burnt to the ground and utterly destroyed and all that has survived is a novelist's description of an arbour:

> There were three very fine Gardens, one leading into another, the last of which terminated in a little Wilderness, thick and shady.
>
> A small Canal was cut through the middle on each side of which grew stately palms, whose intermingling Boughs met seemingly to shake hands and formed an arch over the Water.
>
> A more delightful Scene, nor one more suited either to Love or Contemplation, could not be found.

Was it there, long ago that the young Lancelot Lee eavesdropped (perhaps accidentally) on Tom and Betty engaged in happy flirtation—and the seeds of jealousy were sown?

Arson was freely talked of at the time, and the tradition came down in the Cresswell family that the fire was caused by the slighted wife. By the twentieth century some thought this was Anne Cresswell, but that is quite impossible.

There is no record that she ever went to Sidbury, old Mrs Cresswell's home, where she was still living until after Anne and her husband had separated. Formal visits had been exchanged between Pinkney and Bibury. Sidbury was comparatively remote. Neither would she have destroyed her children's heritage.

If angry wife it were, it could only have been Betty, but is as much out of character for her as for the other.

By nature she had been sweet and laughing 'caressed by all her acquaintance', and her sin originally, if sin it was, had only been that she fell too deeply in love and was thereafter caught in love's toils and lost her way.

Her health was frail and everything points to her having been consumptive and so, in modern parlance, highly sexed; which only her cousin knew and it accounts for the note of grievance

that sometimes creeps into his narrative and for the contrast between her character and behaviour.

She was intelligent, temperamental, timid, and elusive, quite unable to stand up to anyone or even to face facts. She avoided her sister, evaded her grandmother, eluded her brother, escaped from her cousin—and in the end from Mr Lee.

She had the charm that so frequently goes with weakness and irresponsibility and so often evaporates in face of sterner qualities. She could never have organized or directed such a deed, although she might have condoned it, soothing her conscience with some specious reasoning; but even that is hard to believe for she loved Sidbury.

If arson it was, just one person stands out clearly, who had everything to gain, who could easily have arranged it and had a burning desire for revenge to satisfy, other means having failed. One who knew the house intimately, was a close neighbour and a powerful land-owner and magistrate, whom none would dare to accuse; and there would be no proof.

Lancelot Lee's conceit was dangerously paranoic and had he not publicly declared that his duty to mankind obliged him to bring his enemy to infamy and punishment.

It can never be known, though somewhere in eternity recorded in light and sound, the truth eddies on.

Sidbury Hall passed out of existence, until in the twentieth century it was rebuilt on another site close by. Thomas Estcourt Cresswell rebuilt his ruins on the ancient site into a farmhouse, which is still in use.

As her old home went up in flames Betty's hopes and aspirations went with them; her proud resistance broke and she gave in.

At the beginning of January 1751 she and Lancelot Lee were married and before the summer was over, she was dead.

The actual cause of death was the advent of a still-born child, but she was weary and who can say it was not a broken heart that made her glad to go.

So much pain—so much suffering—as the angel of death drew near—then all was over and her tired spirit had found release.

The eternal God is thy Refuge and underneath are the everlasting Arms.

It was sadly ironical that her fate, so commonplace in her century and for long after, should be the one they had unfeelingly hoped for poor Anne Warneford.

The shock of her sudden death silenced the gossips and the episode was closed.

What was she really like this frail neurotic girl, who not only captured, but held, the hearts of both young men?

Her contemporary, the Lady of Shropshire, described her:

> ... [she was] possessed of the most agreable Accomplishments and although she could not challenge the first Place at the Table of Beauty, yet she had something in her Face that gave the Beholder more Delight than Beauty itself. Her Charm did not proceed so much from the Regularity of her Features as from the pleasant Air of her Countenance, which her good Humour and natural Disposition to smile, continually diffused over it. Thus, without studying the Art of captivating Admirers, she had more of them than those Ladies who make it the whole Practice of their Lives.

Against her background there was pathos in Betty's adherence to her standards and courage in her determination to uphold them. Her great uncle Sir Carr Scrope had been one of Nell Gwynne's circle and her sister had married a grandson of the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth and his wife, Duchess of Buccleuch in her own right. Queen Anne had created his father Henry Scott, Earl of Deloraine in 1706. Deloraine was in Selkirkshire and the new peer had had a seat in the last Parliament of Scotland, voting in favour of the Treaty of Union. Thereafter he had been chosen a Scottish Representative peer, was vested with the Order of the Bath and became a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to George I, but was also a distinguished soldier, a Major-General with a reputation for great courtesy and charm, said to be derived from his royal ancestry. (His mother did not agree and reproached him for extravagance and gracelessness, leaving him only £5 in her will!) He died very suddenly on Christmas Day 1730 and was succeeded by the son who was Betty's brother-in-law. Four years later, when Betty was a girl in her teens and the Cresswell-Scrope story was about to begin, the widowed Lady Deloraine married again. Her second husband was sub-governor to the Duke of Cumberland, favourite son of the King and Queen—Butcher Cumberland to be—and she was appointed

governess to the little princesses at Court, where she received the marked attention of His Majesty George II.

Lord Hervey, her contemporary, wrote in his memoirs:

> One of the vainest as well as one of the simplest women who ever lived, but she had one of the prettiest faces ever formed and though now five and thirty had a bloom that not one woman in ten thousand has at fifteen.

Stuart wit and elegance had given place to Hanoverian coarseness and lax morals still prevailed at Court, in Society, and everywhere else. It was rare for any young woman to refuse a man, her superior in station.

Betty in her way was an early feminist and in her century women saw the dawn of their emancipation, but during her lifetime they were still very much the chattels of their fathers and husbands. In her case her eldest brother Scrope was responsible for her, whose vigilance she constantly eluded, but who had to fight a duel on her behalf.

She was brought up to obedience and took it for granted that decisions and responsibility were the prerogatives of men. Women, she felt, should be judged on the merit of their personal lives, not on matters of sex where men dominated. She fought with all her might and but little regard for fact, for her virtue, her reputation and her individual justification; for she knew, although her conscience troubled her, she had never wanted to sin.

The eighteenth century was more practical than romantic and in relation to sex, passion was a word more commonly used than love.

Passion could be gratified and liaisons were recognized as beneficial, if not essential, for general health and well-being and an elixir for jaded beaux and fading beauties. There was nothing fantastic in Thomas Cresswell's reprehensible prescription for his cousin's cure. He was a realist and a man of his time, with all the confidence of youth; competent, methodical, gregarious and kindly disposed, but not romantic.

Lancelot on the other hand, a shy and introverted youth, brought up by adoring females, much travelled but not a good mixer with his fellow men, was a romantic, and declared his rival 'incapable of Love'.

It was three years before Lancelot married again. His second wife gave him a son and two daughters and much later in life, after her death he married a third time.

He died in Italy in 1775 aged fifty-six, of a fever, and from the memorial erected in Coton Chapel he had emulated the high principles enunciated by Betty, which she had not lived to fulfil.

> A Man esteemed and beloved for Integrity; of Life exemplary and Purity; of a vigorous and acute Understanding and infallible Search after Knowledge, improved by visiting various and distant Countries; an active and impartial Magistrate, a warm Friend, an affectionate Husband and father.

He was succeeded by his son Harry Lancelot Lee to whom he bequeathed his magnificent ancestral estate; but his son, as sometimes happens with sons of priggish fathers, mismanaged his affairs, squandered and dissipated his fortune and 'this most ancient family' came to an end and Coton passed into other ownership.

Thomas Estcourt Cresswell about three years later entered Parliament as M.P. for Wootton Bassett, which his father had represented thirty years before. He held the seat for twenty years, being returned unopposed in 1761 and 1768 and did not contend the election of 1774, probably on the grounds of age or expense.

The 1754 election had been both expensive and corrupt. Although only a small country town, Wootton Bassett sent two Members to the House of Commons. Thomas Cresswell's fellow associate was a family connection, Long of Bainton.

It was a typical pre-reform contest and a contemporary newspaper reported an unusual amount of rioting:

> There are four Gentlemen put up and both Parties have treated. But last Saturday sennight they came to such a pitch as to force a House and take possession. There were Guns, Pistols and Swords on both sides, but nobody was murdered, which is feared will be the Case before it is over. Eight Men are already in Salisbury Gaol.

Another account:

> . . . nearly £6000 was spent by one side alone, 30 Guineas a Man; and £1100 was paid for Beer etc. at the Horse and Jockey, the Royal Oak, the Cross Keyes and other resorts in the town.

Thomas Cresswell who had an orderly legal mind, was scandalized and fell out with his Agent, who said he was only offered

£20, a sum so at variance with the reports that it increased the Cresswell reputation for parsimony spread by the pamphlets.

It would appear that the locals had a grand time and in the good old time-honoured way profited all they could, but voted despite pressures, as they had all along intended, for the local squires they preferred.

In this election Thomas Cresswell was an adherent of Henry Fox, later 1st Lord Holland who had recently bought Norton Manor (sold in 1713 from Pinkney estate) and who was probably influential in obtaining his appointment as Purveyor of Chelsea Hospital, a post he held from 1759–61, when the Whigs lost power.

He is not likely to have approved Government policy leading to the Boston Tea Party of 1773, for in 1774 Lord Holland's younger son, Charles James Fox, the virtual leader of the Whigs, was the active opponent of the Government's American policy under the leadership (albeit unwilling) of Lord North.

Thomas Cresswell's first years in Parliament from 1754 were the most brilliant of the elder Pitt's administration and covered the Seven Years War.

In his last years 1768–74 he was joined in the House by his son Estcourt Cresswell, elected as a young man of twenty-three to represent Cirencester.

In those days the country gentlemen M.P.s were not strictly aligned with a particular party and their votes had to be wooed, for they numbered more than a hundred.

There was no divorce between Cresswell and his wife, nor any indication that either sought one.

He lived in congenial company at Pinkney with friends who may also, it is thought, have been related to his wife; but he kept Betty's portrait all his life. Not a very good painting perhaps, but the artist had captured a certain sweetness, a kissable look.

He died aged seventy-six on 14th November 1788, the year before the French Revolution broke out, which would alter the entire structure of the world as he had known it.

Desiring no epitaph he ordered a plain memorial to be erected in Sherston Church, recording simply the names of the last Estcourts and his father and mother and himself.

The Cresswells possess the Hatchment hung out at Pinkney to announce his death.

The arms are those of Cresswell quartered with Estcourt in the centre an 'escutcheon of pretence' of the Warneford Arms, showing his wife to be an heraldic heiress.

Family records if accurate (by no means always the case) indicate that his son and daughter-in-law came to Pinkney before he died, for their fourth son, christened Estcourt, is recorded as having been born at Pinkney on 3rd December 1788, barely a fortnight after his grandfather's death. There is also a touch of sorrow—in his will the grandfather left a small legacy to his little grand-daughter Barbara, so he must have known and loved the child who died a few weeks later on Christmas Eve. The Cresswells lost both their little girls in childhood, but eight grandsons grew to manhood.

Thus one by one did the principal characters leave the stage, the last strands woven in the pattern of their lives.

Anne Warneford, Mrs Cresswell, was the last to go, surviving her husband by just over two years and dying on 12th April 1791. For many years she had the companionship of her daughter Frances, who did not marry until she was well over 40 and then married Dr Hall of Lewisham, the year before her mother died.

Mrs Warneford died in Bath in 1756 and Miss Sackville in 1760. All the memorials are in Bibury Church and their wills in Gloucester Records Office.

Gervase Scrope and his brothers were the last of their line. The family had been illustrious even earlier than the fourteenth century when Richard Scrope was Lord Treasurer to Edward III and became 1st Baron Scrope of Bolton, father of William Scrope, Earl of Wiltshire. Another of the family was created Baron Scrope of Masham and was father of Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York 1350–1405. In the seventeenth century the two branches were established at Cockerington, near Louth, Lincs and Castle Combe, Wilts. In the Civil War Sir Gervase Scrope of Cockerington raised a regiment for the King's service and although left for dead with sixteen wounds at Edgehill, he recovered to live until 1655. He and his son were fined £6,000 for their loyalty or 'delinquency', as it was called—which further impoverished the family.

Betty's brothers, Gervase the eldest and foolish Fred the youngest, give the impression of always having lived beyond their means, probably through an addiction for the gaming tables, a fashionable failing in that epoch.

In 1795 their line died out and the Cockerington estate passed to William Scrope, already heir through his father of the Castle Combe properties. He was a distinguished classical scholar, a well-known sportsman, and an artist, who lived to be over eighty (1772–1852) and was the last direct male representative of this celebrated family, so much interwoven with English history. He left an only daughter, whose descendants took his name.

Cockerington manor-house was taken down and exported to America.

'The Evil that men do lives after them.' More than two centuries have passed and Lancelot Lee lies forgotten in his grave; but Thomas Estcourt Cresswell who could not live out of company and never lacked friends, served his country for twenty years in Parliament and so his name has survived in its annals; and also, pleasantly enough, in Cresswell Gardens, Chelsea, and Cresswell Place, converted from the old mews; yet modern authors, oblivious of rights and wrongs in a by-gone age, still rake up the scandal against him and label him an unmitigated villain, their verdict based on the gossip condensed into the anonymous letter so wickedly published by Lancelot Lee in the *General Evening Post* of 3rd October 1747, with which he launched his publicity campaign.

CHAPTER NINE

The Pleasing Prospect of Bibury

SOME HOUSES like people make an imprint on time, developing their own aura from the lives lived in and around them.

Bibury was and is a house of great charm with a long history woven of colourful strands; 'a composite house, a stately building of the year 1633 built on the fragment of a Tudor house of lower pitch but equal picturesqueness . . . roofed with beautiful stone slates. A typical Cotswold house on a large scale, gracious and fitting in form and weathered to a charming tint . . . and the architectural manner of its village matches it.'

The ancient parish of Bibury contained four manors, those of Bibury Northumberland, Bibury Osney, Arlington and Ablington.

When the monasteries were suppressed Henry VIII assigned the manors of Bibury and Arlington towards the endowment of the newly founded Cathedral of Christ Church, Oxford, but they were omitted from a second charter, retained by the Crown and leased in 1547 to Sir John Harrington.

During the next few years a lot of speculation went on in confiscated monastic lands and in 1552 Bibury and Arlington somehow got sold by William the Earl of Pembroke to Hugh Westwood, a highly suspicious transaction, for he was the King's Escheator—the man responsible for confiscations. Nevertheless Hugh Westwood became 'a Justice of the Peaxe in the Countie of Gloucester'.

He was succeeded by his nephew Robert Westwood who fell

into debt, but was granted a pardon by Queen Elizabeth for contempt of court at Shrewsbury in a Plea of Debt. Later in a will he designated himself as 'late of Bibury' and he died in Fleet Prison leaving a son William Westwood (baptized at Bibury 1563).

Samuel Rudder (1779) connects Bibury Northumberland with the Duke of Northumberland and says that after his attainder, when Mary Tudor came to the throne, different people coming into favour, the manor was granted to John Walters and Thomas Carpenter (1553) but that William Westwood was Lord of it in 1608 and that Sir Thomas Sackville bought it in 1623.

Among the Bibury MS in Gloucestershire Records Office are records of proceedings by Humphrey Webb, Seneschal of William Westwood, Lord of the Manor of Bibury in 1611 and onwards until 1620; also a letter written by Sir Thomas Sackville himself, mentioning that he bought Bibury from William Westwood.

In another letter he confirms the statement of a Mary Forden of Ampney Crucis, sister of William Westwood, that she is related to Lady Sackville—'kin-a-far' he calls her and this accounts for his generosity to a Richard Westwood who sent him begging letters.

With the manors of Bibury and Arlington Sir Thomas Sackville acquired the Patronage of the Vicarage and 'the Peculiar Jurisdiction of Bibury', by which its vicars held special privileges exempting them from the authority of the bishop in the diocese of Gloucester.

In the Bibury Church Chest was a very ancient memorandum book recording the persistence with which successive vicars upheld these privileges. Two hundred years later the Rev. Sackville Cresswell, Sir Thomas Sackville's descendant, was to do the same. A lively correspondence ensued between himself and the Bishop of Gloucester; the vicar won his point and the bishop was prevented from making a formal visitation to Bibury.

Mystery surrounded the origin of Sir Thomas Sackville of Bibury because a copyist, on the Heralds' Visitation to Gloucester in 1623, casually wrote him into his father-in-law's pedigree as alias 'Toots' and there was no mention of Bibury.

The rebuilding of the old manor had hardly begun and the explanation of Toots lies in Sir Thomas's own signature, of which

there is an example in the Wiltshire Record Office, before he was knighted. In the document his name is written in full at the top as 'Thomas Sackville alias ffooks of the Citie of Westminster', but he signed it 'Thomas Sackville alias fooks', to look very like 'toots.'

Dugdale reported him as 'Thomas Sackville alias forbes, one of the Gentlemen-Ushers, daylie wayters to K. James who knighted him 12 Junii 1622'. Probably his mother's name was ffoulkes; in another MS it is given at Footes.

He is clearly described in the Wiltshire Pedigrees of the 1623 Visitation as the natural son of the 1st Earl of Dorset and as 'of Pewsham', 'a Knight and a Gentleman-Usher in dailie Waiting on the King', married to Barbara, daughter of Sir John Hungerford of Down Ampney, Glos.

The marriage would have taken place about 1614 because the Heralds named three of their children—'John filius et heres aetat 8 annorum 1623, Cecilia aet 4 and Suzanna aet 2'.

From the Bibury MS it is known that Sir Thomas Sackville and his lady lived in London at Axe Court.

An endearing letter from his mother-in-law, Lady Hungerford, asks them to take care of Sir John and not let him go out until the weather is warmer; and in another young John, his brother-in-law, begs a loan because his drinking 'has been more baneful and pernicious than here-before' and he has 'neither credit nor money's worth'.

It would appear that Sir Thomas Sackville received his knighthood on retirement because he forthwith bought the Manor of Ashton Keynes on the border of Wilts. and Glos. from his father-in-law and then almost immediately Bibury, where extensive rebuilding operations were begun.

Inigo Jones is said to have designed part of his stately new mansion—he was already in the neighbourhood engaged on Sherborne Park.

King James must have legitimized Sir Thomas, granting him the right to bear his late father's arms, for not only did the Heralds record his pedigree, the Sackville arms are carved with six quarterings, and impaled with the arms of Hungerford and five quarterings, above the door of Bibury Court, with the initials $_{T}{}^{S}{}_{B}$ 1633. Also he used the Sackville heraldic seal for correspondence.

He did not retain Ashton Keynes, his other manor. A letter from an Alan Bishop dated January 1631 hopes Sir Thomas will conclude its sale to Sir Henry Poole because he is 'anxious for himself and the tenants to be in the hands of one whom they know'.

The Cresswell portrait of Sir Thomas Sackville of Bibury shows an expressionless individual in a Vandyck collar, but he has the reputation of having been a kindly, tolerant, country gentleman. He died in 1647, by which time King Charles was a prisoner and the world he had known lay in ruin.

His age is uncertain. Documents relating to the Manor of Marston Maisey, near Down Ampney and Ashton Keynes, state that it was assigned to Thomas Sackville by his father early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, but this could have been his legitimate half-brother of the same name.

The 1st Earl of Dorset acquired no fewer than sixteen manors in addition to his seat at Buckhurst and the famous estate of Knole, given to him by the Queen.

The Sackville family has a fascinating history that is very well documented, for they became so prominent and were so brilliant, 'always as eminent for their ability as for their quality', due perhaps to the great store they set on intensive education.

Their ancestors were Normans, taking their name from a Normandy village and came to England with the Conqueror.

By the time of Henry VIII, Richard Sackville was an established land-owner in Kent and Sussex—and was a cousin of Anne Boleyn. The story of his outstanding financial ability has survived, that he so made use of it as to earn the name of 'Fill-Sack'. Under Mary he was a Catholic and under Elizabeth a Protestant and became Chancellor of the Exchequer, but 'the Seal remained with the Queen'!

He died in 1566 and was succeeded by his more famous son Sir Thomas Sackville (1534–1608).

Sir Richard had been knighted and on 8th June 1567 his son was knighted, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, by the Duke of Norfolk.

Sir Thomas had married in 1554 Cecily, daughter of Sir John Baker, Speaker of the House of Commons, to whom he remained devoted throughout his life—despite his natural son by another

woman. Like his father he was ambitious, rich and sagacious and it proved of infinite value to be a relation of the Queen, a link that he cherished; but he was also a very able man and although declared 'extravagant beyond all bounds' he made his mark not only as a statesman and diplomatist but as a poet and author. In literature he was the connecting link between Chaucer and Spenser and as part author of the first important English tragedy he helped to rid the theatre of its early rigid conventions, clearing the stage for Marlowe and Shakespeare.

Queen Elizabeth created him Lord Buckhurst. She also appointed him a Commissioner at the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots, and to him fell the grim duty of breaking to Mary the news of her impending execution, which he accomplished with such grace that she expressed appreciation.

In 1585 in prevailing Tudor fashion, he was imprisoned after a quarrel with Leicester, but in 1588 was made a K.G. 1591 saw him Chancellor of the University of Oxford and in 1594, on the death of Burghley, the Queen made him Lord High Treasurer of England.

James I held him in equally high esteem, confirming his appointments, and in 1604 created him 1st Earl of Dorset.

John Aubrey wrote that the old man fell seriously ill when he was seventy-two and the King sent him a ring, set with twenty diamonds with a message, hoping that he might live 'as long as the dyamonds of that ring did endure'. Aubrey also described his dramatic death at the Council Board two years later in the presence of the King: he was making a speech and 'pulling out some writings in his Bosome' he declared 'Here is that will strike you dead' and 'on the instant fell down himself and was dead. On opening his head they found in it certain little bags of water which falling upon his brain had caused his death.'

He left a very detailed and munificent will dated 1-8-1607.

Robert the 2nd Earl, his eldest son, married to the daughter of the Duke of Norfolk, survived his father by less than a year, dying in February 1609 when his own heir Richard Sackville, the elder of his two sons, was only twenty.

Richard the 3rd Earl 'lived in the greatest splendour of any Nobleman of his time in England' but died when only thirty-five leaving two daughters, so that the 4th Earl was his brother

Edward, described by Clarendon as 'beautiful, graceful, and vigorous, his wit sparkling and sublime'.

Edward had a distinguished career but led a wild youth and is remembered for the extraordinary duel that he fought with his friend Edward Bruce, 2nd Lord Kinloss, when he was twenty-three.

The two young men crossed to Flanders and fought on a piece of land bought for the purpose. Lord Bruce was killed and Sir Edward Sackville, as he was then, was severely wounded.

He was travelling in Italy when his brother died and inherited the family estates much encumbered in 1624.

The following year he was made a K.G. and in 1626 a P.C. to Charles I, and in 1628 Lord Chamberlain to the Queen, so the Sackville influence at Court was again fully established.

He played a distinguished part in the Civil War and in 1647 was one of the six peers who intended to go to Charles I at Hampton Court and reside with him there as a Council; but Parliament would not permit it. He took no further part in public affairs and is said, after the King's execution, never to have left his house in Salisbury Court, Fleet Street, refusing to cross his threshold into an England ruled by the murderers of his King.

He died in July 1652.

The Sackvilles of Bibury thus shone in a good deal of reflected glory as members of so prominent a family.

Sir Thomas directed in his will that should his own line fail, Bibury was to go to Edward Sackville, younger son of the 4th Earl. Actually, by the time his will was proved, the young man was already dead, murdered in cold blood by a Roundhead soldier soon after being taken prisoner near Oxford in 1646. His elder brother Richard, the 5th Earl, had been captured earlier in the war so played no active part in it. He inherited his family's scholastic tastes and was the translator of *Le Cid*.

The Cresswells have a charming portrait of the 5th Earl and his brother Edward as boys, that came to them with Bibury.

Luckily Sir Thomas Sackville of Bibury's own line did not fail, but later it passed twice through heiress daughters and two centuries later his descendants lost Bibury in a most extraordinary way.

The Dorset Sackvilles increased in wealth and prestige. The 7th Earl, a portly pompous figure at the Court of Queen Anne, was sent to Hanover to announce to George I his accession to the English Throne and was rewarded in 1720 for his many services with a Dukedom.

The line of the Sackville succession though chequered did not fail until the 5th and last Duke died unmarried in 1843 and all his titles became extinct.

A generation later (1876) Queen Victoria revived the name, creating the Hon. Mortimer Sackville-West who was a member of her household, Baron Sackville, and he inherited the wonderful old house, Knole Park, presented by Queen Elizabeth to his ancestor. It had originally been a monastery and for more than a century had belonged to the Archbishops of Canterbury, but Henry VIII took a fancy to it and insisted that Archbishop Cranmer should give it to him.

Lord Sackville was a grandson of the 3rd Duke of Dorset through his younger daughter, Countess de la Warr, who had several sons; but at one time the 5th Duke of Dorset and the Cresswells of Bibury were the only male descendants of the illustrious Elizabethan statesman.

Barbara Hungerford, wife of Sir Thomas Sackville of Bibury brought her husband ancient lineage in lieu of a large dowry, for the Hungerfords were more anciently illustrious than the Sackvilles.

Sir Thomas Hungerford of Farley Castle was the first Speaker of the House of Commons in the last Parliament of Edward III (1377). He died 1398. He had been closely associated with John of Gaunt and was Steward of his Household, and both he and his father had represented Wiltshire many times in Parliament. His grandfather, Walter de Hungerford had married the heiress of Heytesbury, Wiltshire and the arms of Hungerford were usually shown quartered with those of Heytesbury.

The Speaker married Joan, heiress of Sir Edmund Hussey and their son Walter, knighted by Edward IV, who served with distinction in France, became Lord Hungerford of Heytesbury K.G.

Of Lord Hungerford's three sons, the second surviving one married Margaret Burnell and was the ancestor of the Hunger-

fords of Down Ampney. (His second wife was a very scandalous lady, the countess of Arundel, born a Berkeley.)

John Aubrey in the seventeenth century drew an illustration of Sir John Hungerford's shield in a window of Down Ampney Church showing twenty quarterings, also that of his son Anthony, and supplied a key to most of the arms.

Set out thus in a small space, without one word of troublesome writing, was the noble knight's whole pedigree, that all might study for generations to come, where families connected and whence they sprang, for in those days arms were familiar, easily recognizable symbols.

The Hungerfords spread all over Wiltshire and Gloucestershire and could readily be traced by their device of a sickle.

Aubrey also described memorials in Latin to Sir John and his lady.

Recently the secluded, peaceful little church at Down Ampney has been altered and restored, and now in the tiny Hungerford Chapel, above the altar, kneel the life-like effigies carved in 1637, of Sir John and his son, facing each other in prayer across a table, on which repose their Bibles.

They have good strong noses and splendid moustaches that would be creditable in the modern R.A.F., and resemble each other closely, but whereas one wears a Jacobean ruff and his moustache turns down to meet a flowing beard, the other, in a Charles I collar, has a neat small beard, like his royal master's and the ends of his moustache turn up.

Underneath are their memorial plaques. That of Sir John reads:

> In the Chapel lieth the Body of Sir John Hungerford, lineally descended from Sir Walter, Lord Hungerford, Knight of the Garter. Was honourable in his life, served his King and Country, liberal to his Friends, charitable and courteous to all. He first married Mary, daughter of Sir Richard Barkley by whom he had three sons and three daughters, and afterwards Anna, daughter of Edward Guddard. He died the 18 day of March in the 69th year of his age in the reign of King Charles I Anno Domini 1634.

The monument was erected by his son 'in ye LIIth yeare of his age to ye honour of his deare father and in remembrance of his own mortality'.

The first Lady Hungerford's memorial has been parted from her husband's since the alterations. The inscription on her tombstone ran:

> Here lies Maria, Lady Hungerford, late wife of Sir John Hungerford, Knight (who from Maurice, Lord of Berkeley through the Lady Isabella his Wife, daughter of Richard, Duke of Cornwall and King of the Romans. She finally descended from King John.)
>
> She was of true Piety, a rare example of good Learning, very studious, most observing, of an exquisite Modesty, dear to her Husband, most loving to her Children, full of Charity and good Words for her Acquaintance and Friends. She lived most unitedly with her Husband forty-four years. An abcess in her Breast finished her Life the 18th July about 7 o'clock in the Evening, the 65th year of her Age, in the year of our Lord 1628. [English computation.]
>
> 'Such the Life that the end Virtue lives after Death' The last of my Duty and Love towards the same Mary, Lady Hungerford and true testimony. Wilhelminus Platt.

William Platt of Highgate was a son-in-law.

Henry III's brother Richard Earl of Cornwall led the Crusade of 1240. They were the sons of King John. In 1257 Richard was elected King of the Romans, the title by which the Ruler of Germany was known, but was not crowned Emperor.

He quarrelled with his brother, but after marrying his second wife Sanchia of Provence, sister of Henry's Queen, he returned to England and tried to act as mediator between his brother and the barons, siding with his brother when war broke out. Between the battles of Lewes and Evesham he was imprisoned.

His first wife, Isabella, was the daughter of the great William Marshall (died 1219) Earl of Pembroke by marriage to the heiress assigned to him by Richard Coeur de Lion, when he charged him to 'guard England' for him during his absence on Crusade. She was the mother of the Isabella who married Maurice, Lord of Berkeley (died 1284).

Richard, Earl of Cornwall built Hayles Abbey in Gloucestershire, near Winchcombe, to enshrine a philtre of our Lord's Blood—thence an old saying 'God's in Gloucestershire'. Not much remains of the Abbey. After the Reformation it lay in ruins and its masonry gradually disappeared for use in other buildings.

The fate of John, eldest son of Sir Thomas and Lady Sack-

ville of Bibury is unknown, except that he died a few months after his father in 1647.

Among the Bibury MS is a letter from him as a lad of fifteen in London, to his parents at Bibury. Also there is a letter of Sir Thomas' referring to the will of Robert, 2nd Earl of Dorset (his half-brother) and another mentioning his 'Suit to the King'. This may have been to obtain recognition of his first-born, already eight years old when his father was knighted, and to have him confirmed as a Sackville. He may have been the John Sackville, not otherwise accounted for, who was left in charge at Knole, where the Earl of Dorset kept a considerable armoury, and who was taken prisoner when the Parliamentarians sent three Troops of Horse to confiscate the weapons at the beginning of the Civil War. In 1642 he would have been twenty-seven.

Bibury was inherited by Richard Sackville, a younger brother, born 1633, whose marriage settlements are among the Bibury MS, drawn up in 1655 when he was already married to Joyce Trinder. 'Mistress Joy Sackville' died at Bibury in January 1657 and her husband in the following year married Elizabeth Arden of Holford who produced a child almost yearly until her husband died in 1670, when she married the Vicar of Bibury, the Rev. Vanman and had several more. Bibury was duly inherited by one of her sons, Henry Sackville, born 1662, who succeeded to Arlington as well as all the Biburys.

Henry Sackville was married at St Martins-in-the-Fields, London in 1684 to Anne Logan and had a daughter Elizabeth, born 1688, who married Edmund Warneford and was the Mrs Warneford of the pamphlets.

Anne Logan died and her husband married again only to lose his second wife when she gave birth to twins a year later.

The boy twin, John, survived only a few months but the girl grew up to be Katherine Sackville, the maiden aunt of the pamphlets.

Henry Sackville died in 1712, leaving his two daughters as co-heiresses and his estate was divided between them and in the following year Elizabeth married.

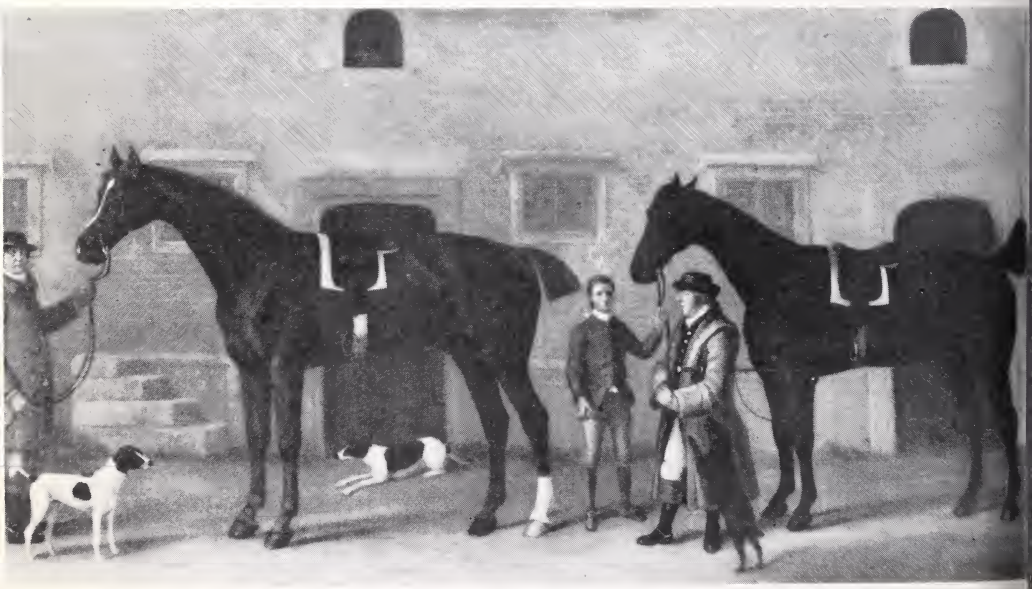
The Warneford heritage was not so resplendent as Sackville or Hungerford but not less ancient, tracing its descent from the time of the first Crusade. The family was one of the oldest in

Bibury Court, Gloucestershire (in 1912). Copyright *Country Life.*

Bibury Court, showing the Coat of Arms 1633 and the Rainwater Heads of 1759.
Copyright *Country Life.*

Henry Sackville of Bibury 1662-1712 The Bibury portrait showing the crooked little finger on the left hand.

The arms in the corner are those of Hungerford-Heytesbury. Sir John Hungerford's daughter married Sir Thomas Sackville and her mother was a Berkeley.



Estcourt Cresswell, by Sartorius 1777, outside his stables at Bibury showing his favourite horse Tavender and his head groom Stanbrook.

Estcourt Cresswell, D.L., J.P. *of Pinkney, Bibury, and Sidbury, 1745–1823. M.P. Cirencester 1768–74.*

'A Man excelled by none in urbanity of manner and Goodness of Heart.'

Mary Gregory aged 24–25. 1758–1815. Second wife of Estcourt Cresswell of Pinkney etc., painted by T. Beach in 1783.

A private not an official representation. The Saracen's head should not wear a wreath and there should be a red mullet (a five pointed star) on his chest. Interesting for the arms depicted: Cresswell—Corbert—Estcourt; Warneford—Sackville—Cresswell. On the 1663 memorial the Squirrels' paws are right up to their noses.

The Armorial Bearings of Charles Richard Estcourt Cresswell, Pinkney Park Wilts, and of Sidbury, Salop. 22nd in descent from Edward I, born 1842.

Ablington Manor, Gloucestershire, bought by John Coxwell of Cirencester in 1516. It was rebuilt and the same name and the date 1590 are above the front door. Copyright *Country Life.*

PLEAD THO
V. MY CAUSE
O LORD BY
IHON. COX
WEL. ANO
DOMENY
1590

Wiltshire and possibly Edmund Warneford did not care that it should be eclipsed by Sackvilles and therefore left Warneford Place, his Sevenhampton estates to his distant relative, the Parson 'that the name might live'.

Aubrey copied an extract from 'an old and very faire and gilt and painted MS in folio on vellum', of a deed in which one of the Warneford family 'confirms to God and the Chapel of St James of Sevenhampton and to Elias there, a house and land which . . . Warn . . . my father of good memory gave to found a daily mass for his soul, with Dirige and Placebo etc.' (Matins and Vespers.) Another extract which ran thus: '9 Aug the obit of John Warneford DD 1393' probably supplied both the founder's name and the year—added Canon Jackson, who in 1882 edited Aubrey's work.

A later John Warneford was Sheriff of Wiltshire in 1589 and Elizabeth Sackville's future father-in-law, Sir Edmund Warneford was Sheriff in 1683.

The south-east chapel in Highworth Church belonged to the family and among their memorials is that of the Parson, whilst the one of Mrs Warneford's husbands is above the altar.

During the Civil War they were Parliamentarians.

A portion of their estates descending in the male line from the reign of King John was still held by the Rev. John Henry Warneford of Warneford Place, the sole land-owner in Sevenhampton, in 1882. Another Warneford, born in the old house, was the celebrated divine and philanthropist Dr S. W. Warneford (1173–1855) Rector of Bourton-on-the-Hill, Glos. and at one time of Lydiard Millicent, Wilts., who lived to be ninety-two. 'Every year's experience,' wrote he 'confirms my opinion that there is no doing much Good without much Trouble.'

He endowed Queen's College and Queen's Hospital, Birmingham with £29,000 and was a munificent benefactor during his lifetime to various societies and charities. The name therefore still survived with honour, for more than a century and a half beyond the greedy Parson of the Pamphlets, and was to die out in glory. The last heir, Flight Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Alexander John Warneford R.N., aged twenty-three, won the V.C. for destroying single-handed a Zeppelin airship over Ghent on 7th June 1915, only to be killed ten days later over Paris.

The scholarly Edmundus Warneford, Armiger, husband of Elizabeth Sackville of Bibury died 25th February 1724, aged forty-two, and by 1737 the colourful tapestry of all these lines had been woven down into a single strand.

The sole amalgam from all these lives was the dumpy, not very attractive person of the one poor little rich girl, Anne Warneford, who came of age in that year—a solitary leaf on the branch of a new generation.

No wonder her family were anxious she should marry and all the more so because she appears to have resembled the Puritan Warnefords more closely than the worldly Sackvilles and to have been deficient in charm.

Edmund and Warneford were later used as Christian names by her Cresswell descendants.

It was Pope, staying at Cirencester in Swift's company who spoke of 'the pleasing prospect of Bibury', but the village remained unknown until much later when William Morris 'discovered' it.

Bibury Court is about seven miles from Cirencester and stands at the end of its delightful village, backed by trees and set amid lawns, beside which winds the Colne, full of fat trout.

Pope was the great arbiter of taste in gardening, in his day, favouring picturesque landscapes that broke away from the clipped hedges and enclosures of the Tudors or the formal style of Versailles. Bibury had—and has—a perfect setting with the natural features he so much admired, and which were then being created at neighbouring Cirencester Park with the help of Charles Bridgeman, who designed Kensington Gardens.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the principal rooms at Bibury were considerably altered and only the upper floors left as they were, and the fine staircase. The date on the rain-water heads is 1759 so Anne Cresswell was responsible for this aggrandisement, as her son was only fourteen. Her mother and her aunt died in 1756 and 1760 and their fortunes fell in for the benefit of her son and she was but following a general trend.

Sherborne Park near Northleach was being altered for the

Dutton family, soon to be ennobled, and Lord Bathurst, soon to be an Earl, was redesigning Cirencester Park.

In 1771 at the time of his first marriage, her son Estcourt Cresswell, in the fashion of the day, had an engraving done of Bibury, which Rudder included in his book on Gloucestershire.

His second marriage, still hidden in the future, would have been a shattering disappointment to his mother, and the end of her ambitions—and by a queer freak of fortune, his bride came from Pinkney.

Through Anne Warneford and her ancestress Mary, Lady Hungerford, whose daughter Barbara married Sir Thomas Sackville, the Cresswells inherited a second strain of royal Plantagenet blood, that vital stream that in the past had produced so splendid and so proud a dynasty.

Some of them also inherited a crooked little finger to their left hand.

This characteristic is plainly shown in the Bibury portrait of Henry Sackville, Anne Warneford's grandfather.

At the top left-hand corner of this portrait is painted a small shield of the Hungerford-Heytesbury arms, but the effigies of Lady Hungerford's husband and son show no such malformation.

The Cresswell owner of the portrait in this century, who has only recently died, had a similar left hand, as did a sister, Agnes Trevaldwyn—two out of a family of thirteen—and he passed it on to his own daughter. It has also been transmitted to a cousin in Natal and to another in Southern Rhodesia.

The oddness is that three other contemporary Cresswells of different families were known by correspondence in 1930 to have the same genetic kink, one in Westmorland, one in Northern Ireland and one in Yorkshire. They all had Plantagenet descent from a daughter of Edward I, but not through the Bibury or the Pinkney lines and in each case attributed the crooked finger to Buccleuch Scott descent. The only known link between the Scotts and the Cresswells of Bibury and Pinkney is the Plantagenet blood.

Although the origin is lost 'the crooked little finger' was always

mentioned as part of the Bibury heritage, now to be woven with that of Cresswell.

Such was the driving energy, the vitality, the good looks and magnetic personalities of the Plantagenets that in the twelfth century it was contemporary belief that they were no ordinary mortals but descended from the devil himself, the fallen angel, through his daughter the lovely Melusine—a witch.

'From the devil we came, to the devil we shall go!' exclaimed one of Henry II's wild young sons, and certainly King John proved more than normally diabolic. Nonetheless their blood through the centuries has always been traced with pride by their many descendants and is part of the English heritage that innumerable loyal subjects share with their Queen.

It was computed by a celebrated genealogist, the Marquis de Ruvigny, that in 1911 there were about 100,000 living descendants of Edward III.

CHAPTER TEN

Estcourt Cresswell D.L., M.P., *1745–1823*

A man excelled by none in urbanity of manner and
Goodness of Heart.

ESTCOURT CRESSWELL, who earned this epitaph, was the only son of the unfortunate marriage of Thomas Estcourt Cresswell and Anne née Warneford. Born at Pinkney 10th May 1745 he was christened at the end of that month at Sherston, but he and his sister Frances were brought up at Bibury, by reason of their parents' separation.

He grew up short and stout and was said to be like the Sackvilles—to the delight of the Bibury family.

Having every opportunity for enjoying life, he did so to the full, settling down after a few years in Parliament as a country squire with many interests and with sporting tastes. In particular he was a keen racing man.

He was the Whig M.P. for Cirencester from 1768–74, elected when only twenty-three, but the age at which his grandfather had entered politics and his circumstances resembled those of his grandfather, though set in a different age. Not for him were the financial embarrassments of his father's youth.

He was not in Parliament during the American War of Independence having been heavily defeated by the Tory vote in 1774; and Cirencester for a long time after was a safe seat for the Bathurst family, represented by Lord Apsley, the eldest son. Another well-known local name, also Tory, was Hicks-Beach, now Lord St Aldwyn.

Estcourt's first marriage was a conventional one to an heiress,

Mary Wotton, of Speechwick Park and of extensive estates in Devon and Somerset; but she died in 1772 after giving birth to a daughter Anne—who grew up to marry when she was thirty, the Rev. Thomas Fry, Vicar of Radley. Her Cresswell grandmother died when she was nineteen, leaving her 'my Indian Cabinet' and a small legacy and probably with her other grandmother, brought her up.

Estcourt was therefore a widower before he was out of his twenties and on his father's estate was growing up a beautiful girl in her early teens, named Mary Gregory. She had lovely red gold hair and according to family tradition he first caught sight of her gleaning in the fields and she was the Sherston blacksmith's daughter.

Their story has a Pygmalion flavour for in course of time she became his wife, but first was his mistress and bore him a daughter, Jane, in 1778, who died in childhood, and in 1779 a son, whom they baptized Thomas Estcourt.

It was very usual in those days to have recognized mistresses, but unusual to marry them—matches being arranged between families of equal rank for mutual benefit. Estcourt Cresswell, with the addition of his first wife's fortune was a highly eligible young man; not only did he own or was heir to large estates in four counties but had two strains of royal Plantagenet blood and 'seize quartiers', a distinction that came to be much prized on the Continent, after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, meaning that his parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and sixteen great-great-grandparents all came from armorial families, so one that his children would lose, should he marry beneath him.

He could have married another heiress whose family would have pushed his career and like other contemporary county families his would probably have risen into the peerage, but it was not the future he craved. Both his parents had experienced the misery of a marriage where the heart had been given elsewhere, and also he may have reviewed his position from a different angle: The family coat of arms carried many quarterings, each representative of a dying line, vested in himself, an only son with an unmarried sister and no first cousins, a widower with an only daughter: Be that as it may, when a third child was due, he and

Mary were married by special licence at Bibury on 14th August 1781. Perhaps quite simply he loved her and was proud of his children.

The new infant was another boy, born on 30th September and baptized Richard Estcourt on 9th October at Bibury—but who would live to inherit the traditional misfortune attached to the heirs of Pinkney.

Estcourt and Mary brought their family up as one and the natural son was known as Thomas Estcourt Cresswell, not Gregory.

Estcourt Cresswell was by no means the only man of his era from the royal princes downwards, who finding themselves happy with a loved and loving mistress, married her. His neighbour the 5th Earl of Berkeley was one who did the same, though he took longer to make up his mind; and invariably it led in the future to financial disaster for the children. But the children existed—Estcourt laid up his treasure upon earth in human lives, for Mary bore him in all seven legitimate sons and another daughter before she died at Pinkney in 1815.

Her epitaph suits a beautiful painting of her by Beach, done in 1783, soon after her marriage.

> Who in the several relations of Life, as a Wife, a Parent, a Friend and a Christian RENDERED HERSELF CONSPICUOUS and by her Beneficence and Charities to the Poor sought to obtain a blessed Immortality.

Her lowly origin would have given her a knowledgeable sympathy, but these words and those relating to her husband, wear a pleasing significance in the twentieth century, much given to emphasizing the records of brutal treatment meted out to the unprivileged classes of that period—such as the gallows for petty theft, the man-traps that crushed a limb for poachers and the horrors of the transportation ships and camps—all the hideous continuation of Judge Jefferies' vicious sentences of an earlier century.

A portrait of Estcourt Cresswell, painted by Sartorius in 1777, outside his stables at Bibury, shows him with his favourite horse Tavender, his head groom Stanbrook, another horse and groom and three dogs; and a pleasant touch is a little puss in the loft embrasure above them. The Eagle Inn at Pinkney village,

which lacked a pub, was built for Stanbrook on his retirement and it remained in his family for several generations.

Estcourt was a keen racing man and a moving spirit of the Bibury Club, which inaugurated its popular Bibury Meeting on Burford Race Course in 1800.

The racecourse, now vanished, lay on the Downs between Bibury and Burford. The Newmarket Spring Meeting had been transferred there in 1681, when Charles II had attended, accompanied by Nell Gwynne. Parliament was then sitting at Oxford and it made a convenient rendezvous.

Burford was a very flourishing country town and was again visited by Royalty in 1695 when William III went there hoping to influence votes in the coming election. During the races the cottagers filled their homes with visitors and slept on or under shop-counters themselves, anywhere they could find.

The Bibury Meeting proved hugely popular under the patronage of the Prince Regent and continued, though in diminishing form, for 150 years, but its palmiest days were before the Prince became George IV.

As Prince of Wales he often attended, staying frequently with Lord Sherborne and could be seen on the course of a morning, riding his favourite cropped roan hack.

A galaxy of gentlemen riders rode at the meeting, who were never again equalled. Amongst them was the 5th and last Duke of Dorset, who always rode for the Prince, and in appearance and skill was said to match any professional.

Others in the entourage were Lord Charles Somerset and Milsington, Lord Delamere, Sir Tatton Sykes, Mr Delme Radcliffe and many more—'Nothing could have been more delightful,' wrote Nimrod, 'than Bibury was at the time in which Frank Raby became a Member of the Club, composed as it was, of the first sporting aristocracy of the day, with the heir-apparent at the head of them.'

He added that Bibury Week was the pleasantest in the whole year for the Prince who was then 'thoroughly divested of the shackles of State and Authority'.

The Bibury Club became the oldest in England and was domiciled in Burford, but eventually moved away to hold its meetings near Salisbury.

Sherborne Park, Lord Sherborne's magnificent mansion was at this period undergoing extensive alteration. Originally it had been the old monastic Grange of Winchcombe Abbey, a hunting seat of the Abbots, but had been converted by Inigo Jones into a house of great splendour, though singularly little comfort, for the Duttons, Lord Sherborne's family.

The village church was attached to one end of it and all the principal bedrooms as well as the drawing-room, dining-room, and library were on the first floor. Downstairs was the horse parlour in which was kept the entire racing calendar.

Although the Prince visited it, Lord Sherborne is said on other occasions to have entertained him at Bibury, in which case he would have rented it for the purpose from the Cresswells.

However, in 1800, the year of the Inauguration of the Bibury Meeting, the Prince was received at Bibury by Estcourt Cresswell himself.

The Prince was thirty-eight and according to Thackeray still handsome and attractive and much given to gracious and charming gestures.

Mrs Cresswell had just given birth to her youngest son. The company had dined well and were in genial mood and the baby was sent for; his health was drunk and the Prince stood godfather; he was then put by into a riding boot for safety, and the party continued.

The baby's other godfather was William, Lord Howe, brother of the famous Admiral who had died in the preceding year. There was a family connection for the brothers had inherited their title in the Irish peerage from their grandfather Scrope Howe, the 1st Viscount, and their father had been Emmanuel Scrope Howe. By coincidence the Admiral was known among his men, who adored him, as 'Black Dick', and it had been Black Dick Cresswell's sister who had married Gervase Scrope.

Walpole's description of the Admiral is reminiscent of a Field Marshal of recent times: 'undaunted as a rock and as silent'.

The baby in the riding boot was presently baptized George William Howe. The silver cup given to him by the Prince is at Sidbury and the Cresswells have a silver coffee pot, used during the Royal visit.

Nimrod (C. J. Apperley) in his *Life of a Sportsman* written

forty years later, mentions Bibury Races and gives a coloured print by Henry Alken of 'The Bibury Meeting in its palmy Days, a Scene on Burford Racecourse'. Also Robert Surtees, writing of Jorrocks gives very graphic and detailed descriptions of English country life in the early nineteenth century, when the eight Cresswell sons grew to manhood.

Their father inherited Pinkney in addition to Bibury, Sidbury and estates in Devon and Somerset and was Lord of the Manors of Sherston, Pinkney, Bibury, Aldsworth and Arlington, so was a man with considerable authority.

He was now approaching sixty and after the marriage of his heir, Richard Estcourt, into the neighbouring Gloucestershire family of Coxwell in 1803, he relinquished Bibury to him and moved down to Pinkney himself, where he built the magnificent stable block that is today the only surviving relic of Cresswell ownership.

The legal settlement of the Bibury estate on his son was dated 7th September 1814.

But the world again was changing and Estcourt Cresswell would live to see the curtain fall on the eighteenth century and his way of life.

The French Revolution brought an influx of new ideas. The Napoleonic Wars brought increased taxation and as their aftermath, rural depression.

The harmony and balance of life was destroyed and prosperous agricultural days were over.

A new middle class was to emerge and it was to be the age of iron, locomotion and industrial revolution, but meantime there was poverty, rioting and misery.

Trying to cope, the Government in 1819–20 drew up the Settlers' Scheme for assisted emigration.

Passages were paid for parties of ten or more under a Leader or Head. Each handed over £10 which was returned in South Africa with 100 acres for each man. Some groups were gentry who recruited their own people and took out a self-contained country home unit.

Over 80,000 people applied, which reflects the chronic depression, but only 3,487 were selected and sailed away, taking many months to complete their voyage.

Thus was born the great province of Natal in South Africa, where the descendants of a Cresswell daughter would one day make their home, and which has now by such strange circumstance been divorced from England.

As the winter of 1820–21 drew to a close and the old squire approached his seventy-seventh birthday, he drew up his last will and testament.

The daughter of his first wife was safely married and the two little daughters of his second marriage had both died as children, but he had seven stalwart legitimate sons and his first-born Thomas, now married with two sons of his own, who all had to be considered and he gave the matter considerable thought.

The settlement of Bibury on Richard was confirmed and its contents declared heirlooms. It is interesting that in his mother's will—for which long ago at the time of their separation, her husband had given permission—she directed, as had her ancestor, Sir Thomas Sackville, that should her son's line fail on the male side, Bibury was to revert to the Sackvilles. Never again should there be a forlorn heiress for barter! This may have influenced her son in establishing Bibury as the family seat; particularly as the Duke of Dorset continued unmarried and his own family were the only other male descendants of the famous 1st Earl. But it may have been because Pinkney was haunted and had its story of misfortune, though it is not likely in that robust age that anyone worried over the Pinkney Skull or took the ghost stories seriously. Another reason may have been that he had established his wife's family in Sherston Manor.

He could not leave Pinkney to an illegitimate son and therefore decreed that the Wiltshire estates should be sold to provide funds for the legacies, debts and funeral expenses.

The first two sons Thomas Estcourt and Richard Estcourt were each to have £20,000 (of which it appears only £3,000 remained outstanding for Richard). Thomas' elder son was to have the interest on £5,000 for life, that sum to sink after his death into the residue of the estate, presumably because he would be his own father's heir. Thomas' younger son was to have the interest on £4,000, that sum eventually to be on trust for his children. Both these boys had been given family names, the

first being another Thomas Estcourt and the other Edmund Warneford.

Estcourt Cresswell's sixth son John was to have £2,000 over and above his marriage settlement; George William Howe, the Benjamin of the family was to have £6,000; and the residue was to be divided among Sackville, Henry, Estcourt, Edmund, John, and George.

The older brothers were already married and would have had their marriage settlements, only George William Howe was still a bachelor.

The lands in Devon were to be held in trust for the grandson Thomas, elder son of the illegitimate Thomas, and his descendants.

It was the pattern followed in similar circumstances by other families with great possessions; an attempt to right the wrong and make up to the first-born for his illegitimacy.

Alas! these careful provisions were ruined by Estcourt's own extravagance. He had lived life to the full and indulged in all the pastimes of his day and is said to have been a great gambler.

His assets were large but so were his commitments and moreover he died at a period of great depression and falling prices, in the last days of 'the Age of Elegance'. Arthur Bryant gives a beautiful description of rural England at the apogee of her agricultural age, during Estcourt Cresswell's lifetime and that of his father.

He died on 4th July 1823 and almost at once difficulties arose.

Perhaps the task was too intricate, the sales too difficult to arrange on a falling market; perhaps Richard, legal heir of Pinkney objected; there may have been recriminations, for the Trustees refused to act and renounced Probate.

In August 1823 John, the sixth son, who was only due £2,000 took the fatal step and filed a Bill in the High Court of Chancery to have the Trusts executed under the authority of the Court. And on 13th August, unlucky day, the Lord Chancellor granted an injunction to restrain the beneficiaries from receiving any of the estate till further order. This was never given; from that point onwards the lawsuit ricocheted in the most fantastic manner for more than forty years, until all those primarily concerned were dead.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Lawsuit and Estcourt Cresswell's Sons

HOW DID THIS large family resolve its difficulties?

The Lord Chancellor who on 13th August 1823 granted the injunctions restraining the beneficiaries from receiving any of the estate, appointed a receiver till further order and referred the matter to Master Dowdeswell to appoint trustees.

The Master reported that he had approved the appointment of Richard Hopkins Harrison and Francis Henry Thomas as trustees and had settled and approved Deeds of Assignment for the original trustees to execute.

However the Lord Chamberlain had not confirmed the report and one of the trustees had refused to execute the assignment at the time of the action reported, which took place in the Prerogative Court, Michaelmas Term, 4th Session 1824.

John Cresswell the applicant, prayed that the new trustees be appointed by the Court at once, to prevent loss to the estate and administration *cum testaments annexo* be granted to them.

The Court rejected the action as premature for the reason—they would not grant administration since the properties were not yet vested in the new trustees and in such circumstances a grant would not be made without the consent of all the beneficiaries, which was not forthcoming at the time.

A footnote to the report adds that on the Caveat day following, administration was granted jointly to Mr Harrison and Mr Thomas, since the original trustees had by then executed the Deeds of Assignment.

However only *one* of the new trustees, Mr Harrison, executed

the deeds and the court directed the grant should not pass till the actual execution of the deeds by Mr Thomas. This he was willing, but unable through absence to do.

And so it went on. There is no information as to whether the grant was ever completed. The tangle is too long ago and too complicated to unravel.

Satan, by now perhaps disguised as Puck, was having a wonderful time as he went to and fro.

Presently it was necessary to produce securities. Sidbury estate was offered—but Sidbury had lost its mansion house and was not considered of sufficient value.

The Wiltshire properties were to be realized for the legacies, so Bibury was taken and all its rents paid into court, which left its squire, the unlucky Richard Estcourt Cresswell, out on a limb.

Richard had been 'bred up to the Law' and was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, but was in fact a country gentleman. In 1803 he had married Elizabeth Coxwell, fourth daughter of the Rev. Charles Coxwell of Ablington Manor, Glos., a long established family, for several generations Rectors of Dowdeswell, whose graves are in Bibury Church—but not an heiress, be it noted. John Coxwell of Cirencester had bought Ablington Manor early in the sixteenth century and ever since it had descended from father to son. Arthur Gibbs rented it for a time and wrote of it very charmingly in *A Cotswold Village* (1898).

There were already several children of this marriage when the Bibury Settlement of 1814 was made.

Richard had unsuccessfully contested the 1818 election as a Whig in the Tory stronghold of Cirencester, against Lord Apsley and Joseph Cripps, polling only 40 out of 412 votes and he was again unsuccessful at Taunton in 1826. Both these contests would have been expensive and after the débâcle of the lawsuit which showed no signs of being settled, he was forced to cross the Channel with his large family and take up residence in a chateau near Boulogne.

Worse was to come, for presently Bibury Court was let on a ninety-nine year lease (according to family tradition) to Lord Sherborne, the rent of course being paid into Court—and ultimately it was sold to him. (It is more likely to have been mortgaged and never redeemed.)

Many people in financial straits crossed the Channel at this period; and in England writs for debt might not be served between sunset and sunrise and not at all on Sunday!

By 1829, the lawsuit unsettled, Richard felt depressed and although he was not to die until 1841, he wrote his will from the Château la Cocherie.

Family history has not recorded what happened to the illegitimate Thomas and his sons, who were to be provided for to the tune of £29,000, other than that their claim consumed the liquid assets of the estate and that Thomas died on 5th May 1838, was buried beside his parents and has a memorial tablet on the family vault in Sherston Churchyard.

No one had authority to realize the properties, Pinkney was not sold, so devolved on the eldest legitimate son, Richard.

Therefore Richard in his will did not mention his own eldest son and heir; the second son had died and so had the youngest, so he mentioned only Corbet, Warneford and Harry. His guns were to be divided among them and his daughters were to have his books; then he specified lands in Devonshire, at Sherston, at Sidbury, Pickthorn and Stottesdon, that were to be sold and the proceeds, after provision for his wife for life, divided among his family. There was also some timber at Sherston to be sold.

The inheritance of the next squire, his heir, would thus be considerably reduced, but at that stage no one could conceive that the lawsuit would prove interminable.

There is an account of Richard in exile at this period—Robert Surtees, writing about 1827 described an amusing and pathetic encounter, although in error he called him Sackville Cresswell. It is however possible that Richard called himself Sackville Cresswell, rather than Estcourt Cresswell, when Bibury was made over to him. In 1827 he was forty-six.

Robert Smith Surtees 1803–64 was the creator of Jorrocks.

Quoted from F. D. Cuming's book on Surtees, p. 38, *Hammersley Papers 1827*:

Riding one day along the Calais road, I heard the unaccustomed cry of hounds and pulling up to listen, presently saw a slipshod looking hare cross before me at a leisurely pace, as if she was not in any great fear of her pursuers.

They soon came yap-yapping and yough-youghing up, under the cheering influence of a portly elderly gentleman dressed in a low-crowned hat with a green frock coat and top boots, riding a good looking bay horse. His servant, similarly attired, was also well-mounted. Field there was none.

It was a hot, sunny afternoon and there was a very bad scent. They dwelt and hesitated a good deal at the road. 'She's across' at length cried I, jerking my head the way she had gone. 'Thank you' replied the sportsman, holding them over when they took the scent at a very languid pace, which presently ended in a general surrender. Puss was reprieved.

This gentleman was a Mr Sackville Cresswell, a native I believe of Wiltshire—a gentleman accustomed to his pleasures of which a pack of hounds was one.

They were chiefly dwarf fox hounds from Mr, afterwards Sir Henry Oxenden's kennels in Kent, and he usually had some seven or eight showy horses which he kept constantly recruiting from England. Indeed he was a patron of the Turf as well as the Chase and had established a villa and what he called a Race course in a sort of rabbited arena among the sand hills, at an out of the way place named Hardelt, near the coast some seven or eight miles to the west of Boulogne, and here there was just going to be a great gathering.

All the hacks of Boulogne were engaged and entered for some real or imaginary stake.

I, of course went, and was much gratified in the way in which the English had imported their manners, even down to the betting post of Newmarket Heath. It had all the attributes of a Race Meeting except jockeys and horses; refreshment booths, a band of music, gendarmes, gentlemen on horseback, gentlemen and ladies in carriages, who came by the overland route, seeing that there was no regular road to the place. The worthy promotor was an equestrian despising wheels.

The beauty of the sport was of course its extreme badness, but as in all amateur performances the actors are thoroughly satisfied, so all the Boulogne gentlemen were well pleased with their equestrian exhibition and at the close of the splendid sunshiny day Mr Cresswell announced that his Hounds would meet at half-past ten o'clock on the following morning, being the 13th August.

I need not say that the crops in France were all gathered by that date, still hunting on the 13th August sounds rather odd to English ears.

Unfortunately the promised Meet did not take place. While at the zenith of his fame and apparent inexhaustibility of his riches there came a sudden collapse and the worthy gentleman was walked off to what the French facetiously call the 'Hotel d'Angleterre' from the circumstance that it was chiefly inhabited by our countrymen, viz the Boulogne gaol for debt. This too at the beginning of his hunting season, though Mr Cresswell was in daily expectation of large remittances from England, for somehow they never came and his continued incarceration seemed highly probable.

Now a pack of hounds is no more use to a gentleman in gaol than a riding master to a Doge of Venice, as Geoffrey Gombard says, and the hounds, in similar parlance, were eating their heads off.

At length Mr Cresswell gladly gave them to Colonel, afterwards General Charitté and myself, to be converted into a subscription pack.

We encountered a little difficulty at the outset. The before mentioned servant in green having bolted, nobody knew the name of a single hound and as we could not bring the late owner to the hounds we were obliged to take the hounds to him, at the Hotel d'Angleterre, to be christened.

This we did in detachments of five couples and were very courteously received by the gaoler, who conducted us upstairs to the late Master's apartment, who gave us their names.

All the six daughters of the above poor gentleman married, but his sons died, so that when he died himself, aged only sixty, in 1841, he was succeeded by Harry—William Henry Cresswell—the fifth son and the only one out of six to survive him.

Harry (1817–80) inherited Pinkney and Sidbury, but Bibury was still in pawn.

Sackville Cresswell 1788–1843, second legitimate son of Estcourt and Mary, was perhaps the luckiest for he was safely installed as the Vicar of Bibury before his father died, and was also Vicar of Arlington and Commissary of Bibury-cum-Winson, and his parish included Ablington.

His spirited altercation with the Bishop of Gloucester whereby he upheld the independence of his 'Peculiar Jurisdiction of Bibury' took place in 1828 and supposedly led to his nickname of 'Bishop of Bibury' which is attached to his portrait.

As early as 1820 he sold part of his inheritance for £234 to Lord Sherborne to redeem his Land-Tax in right of his Vicarage

of Bibury: 'The Tithes and Tenths of Corn, Grain, Hay and Wood of the Vicarage, All of Kilkenny Farm belonging to Lord Sherborne as lay in Ablington in the Parish of Bibury, And reversion Discharged from all Land-Tax whatsoever.'

He lived at Bibury House and his wife whom he married in 1812, was Jane Tombs. They had four sons and three daughters and were the only branch of the family to remain closely associated with Bibury.

The story is recorded of an earlier incumbent of Bibury that he used to preach by an hour glass and when it was run down would turn it over again, assuring his congregation that he intended only one hour more. This was the signal for Mr Sackville, Lord of the Manor, to go out and smoke his pipe, but he always returned in time for the Benediction.

Henry Cresswell, 1787–1849, third son, was the Vicar of Creech St Michael in Somerset. The advowsons of the Vicarage had been given to him by his father. He married Sophia, daughter of John Macintosh Smith, then of Gibraltar, and established his family in Somerset.

Estcourt Cresswell, 1788–1828, fourth son, born at Pinkney (was this unlucky?) died comparatively young and was buried in the family vault at Sherston. He was commissioned 23rd October 1805, as a 2nd Lieutenant, Royal Marines. After his death his widow Sarah, daughter of Joseph Gibbs of Ford, North Wraxall, not far from Bristol, emigrated to Philadelphia, U.S.A. with her family of three sons and four daughters, where she died in 1875. Her eldest boy died aged fifteen in 1833, Joseph, the second, in 1856 and by 1878 only one child was living, Naomi, a baby at her father's death, who had married the Rev. Richard Lewis M.D., and with him paid a visit to Pinkney in that year.

Edmund Cresswell, –1841, was in the Army and lived at Luckington, Wilts. By his first wife, Frances Dangerfield, he had six daughters and by his second, two sons.

John Cresswell –1822, B.A. Cambridge, succeeded his brother Henry in the Vicarage of Creech St Michael in 1849. He married in 1817 Emma Anne Proctor who died 1836 having had two sons and two daughters; and married secondly and had another daughter, Jessica, daughter of Colonel Cornelius Smelt, Governor of the Isle of Man to whose memory the Castletown Folly was erected.

George William Howe Cresswell, 1800–48, the baby of the riding boot, inherited Sherston Manor as his portion and lived the pleasant life of a country gentleman as had his father, though on a very much more modest scale.

He sat on the bench, hunted, fished and shot, reared a large family and is said to have been a man of great charm and from a silhouette portrait was a very good looking one.

In 1826 he married Sophia Anne Hulbert, eldest daughter of Henry Hulbert of Little Somerford, member of an old Wiltshire family from Corsham, who was a wealthy merchant in Mincing Lane.

Unfortunately Mr Hulbert overheard himself described as 'old money bags' shortly before the wedding and after the ceremony declared his irreverent son-in-law should never touch a penny of his money. Nevertheless his miniature shows a kindly face and through this connection two of his grandsons went out to India from the firm in Mincing Lane and made large fortunes.

Indigo was then the profitable crop, but subsequently they became pioneers of the Dooars tea industry; and to them is due the preservation of the Cresswell family portraits and records.

George William Howe died before he was fifty whilst on a visit to his friend General Tupper in Guernsey.

He left his widow with six sons and three daughters, all of whom had to strike out in the world for themselves.

There was an especially close link between this family and that of the eldest brother of Pinkney Park, not only because they lived at Sherston, but through their Coxwell relationship. George William Howe's two eldest sons married two Coxwell nieces of Mrs Richard Cresswell of Pinkney.

Thus were the sons of the grand old squire Estcourt Cresswell dispersed and in the next generation his descendants streamed out into the world to establish themselves all over the British Empire.

The three Cresswell brothers who went into the Church were following a pattern recognized all over England—the eldest son became the squire, the second went into the Church, and the Cresswells were lucky to have the patronage of more than one Living. The third into one of the Services and so on.

In particular the scholarly boys went into the Church and a great debt is owed to the learned eminent men of the rectories and vicarages of country parishes. There were, of course, many genial rosy parsons who hunted, shot and fished and preached from books of sermons on Sundays, but they had mostly grown up in their parishes and knew their congregations intimately.

It was in the growing industrial districts that the Church did not keep pace and lost her common touch, so that a large percentage of the population was heathen; hence the remarkable success of the dedicated Wesley brothers, themselves sons of an Anglican clergyman, who devoted their lives to the enlightenment of the masses and whose inspired preaching and lyrical hymns attracted thousands of ardent followers.

The Cresswells had many affiliations with the Church and their daughters reared their offspring on sternly religious lines.

The Clergy formed a cultured society, compensated for their limited means by the preoccupations of the mind and the pleasures and the beauty of the countryside.

Throughout all these years the lawsuit dragged on, until all Estcourt Cresswell's sons were dead.

At last in 1867 a new Vice-Chancellor, Sir Richard Malins, was appointed—but the story is best told through *The Times* in an article of which the exact date is unfortunately lost.

The case is one of those said to have inspired Dickens in writing *Bleak House*.

> If the lawyers are to be believed nearly the last of the great dreary 'Jarndyce v Jarndyce' Cases, which encumbered the Court of Chancery under the old Law, is at length unrolling itself out of those hopeless caverns.
>
> An enormous 'Bleak House' of litigation is settling down, and the

suitors, or most of them, weary of law, profess themselves content with what they can pick up in equitable shares out of the ruin.

For nearly 40 years have the children and the children's children and kindred and descendants in all degrees of the late (Thomas) Estcourt Cresswell contended over the three great estates bequeathed by him in three counties of England:— Wilts, Glos and Devonshire.

Possession has been enjoyed undisturbed by none! Fourteen separate Causes, protracted through not far from half a century, and that in the costliest Court in the world, have eaten into the bowels of the deceased gentleman's wealth, wasting and consuming it in interminable processes, fattening many, but not the owners; and still the questions in dispute were neither settled nor ever likely to be settled, and so the parties, finding that neither could ever hope to win, have come before a new Vice-Chancellor praying, that the reckoning having been paid into Court the Costs of all should be defrayed out of them and the remainder divided among them.

What these Costs, gathered during 40 years, must have been will be imagined, when it is stated that on Tuesday no less than 13 Counsel appeared, representing different Claims. But even then there arose a fresh contention; A 'Party' was not satisfied.

He flourished a Mortgage in the face of the exhausted litigants.

What—a few more years of paying into Court and getting nothing out of the lands bequeathed in Devonshire, Glos and Wilts forty years ago by (Thomas) Estcourt Cresswell!

The Court however, being a reasonable Court now, and not the Court which went on delaying until the Jarndyces all died and 'Bleak House' came down with a run, would not have it.

For, said the Vice-Chancellor, if there were other Claims, their amount might be ascertained, and so much of the property be left in abeyance as might satisfy them. Who cannot imagine what in other years might have been done! A pebble thrown under one wheel would have stopped the whole enormous engine—for months, for years—for a lifetime perhaps.

Chancery may still be a dark and intricate region: but it has admitted within its precincts some principles of common sense.

Said Sir Richard Malins—'If the people interposing had any rights, let them establish them, and succeeding pay themselves out of "the broad acres of Bibury", for Bibury is one of the estates which in a family sense has so long been lying fallow.'

Even here we note a circumstance eminently characteristic of a Chancery Suit. The estate thus reserved and held in solemn guardianship until the final vestige of litigation has disappeared, is described with magnificent vagueness as worth 'from £40,000 to £80,000' while the claim set up is between £3,000 and £4,000, the balance we presume being held as security for costs.

There is in this a tinge of the ancient splendour which surrounded

that dim Court in Lincoln's Inn with terrors so infinite and filled it with the groans of suitors.

So 'the broad acres of Bibury' remain protected by the seal which no Briton, however free, dares to break, and their rent is paid into the inviolable coffers of the Law.

We have turned to the history of the cause itself and anything more commonplace it would be difficult to conceive, viewed upon the surface, although beneath those tons of pleadings there may possibly lie the materials of a family romance.

But the merest abbreviation would spread itself over acres nearly as broad it may be, as those of Bibury itself.

We wonder however how many of the original litigants are alive on this day; what have been the total costs of the suit; how the immense property has been managed, profitably or not—since its master, so long since dead, left by his Will or through negligence, such a battle to be fought.

It is this which strikes the imagination when we hear that among the last of the old-fashioned Chancery Causes, this is slowly dragging its slow length to an end.

What heart-breaking and disappointments, feuds, jealousies, and hatreds among relatives, tricks, artifices and schemes among attorneys, squandering among them and Counsel, waste, dilapidation, and perhaps poverty, do these forty years of litigation imply!

But haply some have rights who will at length be benefited, which would have been an extraordinary thing in the old times.

The Cresswell records state that the case was given in their favour but the amount divided of what was originally worth over £80,000 was about £4,000. The remainder went to the lawyers.

Thus did the Cresswells lose Bibury and it is not known that any of them ever, who had rights, benefited.

All the advantages of the unhappy marriage between Thomas Estcourt Cresswell and Anne Warneford were thus dissipated. But the head of the family was still the Squire of Pinkney and owned Sidbury and it was believed that one day Bibury might be recovered.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The End or a Beginning

WAS LOVELY PINKNEY an unlucky house for its owners and its heirs? Who can say, but fortune seemed to give an odd twist to all their lives.

Did the Estcourts commit sacrilege, or disturb the churchyard ghosts, by building on the site of the old Chapel of St John the Baptist? Does the relic of the Pinkney Skull date from Ralph de Pinckney, or only from the seventeenth century.

The Estcourts held Pinkney for less than a hundred years and although six Richard Cresswells had succeeded their fathers and done well in the world, the Richard Estcourt Cresswells who followed them were less fortunate.

The first died at twenty, leaving his brother Thomas heir, who met with an implacable enemy; and whose son, although brought up at Bibury, made a social *mésalliance* with a girl from Pinkney.

The next Richard Estcourt suffered the calamity of the lawsuit and the third, although married for ten years left no heir and died before his father, as did his brothers, leaving the sole survivor of six to inherit; and the last Richard Estcourt Cresswell to be Squire of Pinkney could not afford to live there because the family fortune had evaporated in the Law Courts.

In despair portraits and silver were sold to a wealthier cousin, Sackville Cresswell, youngest son of the Sherston Manor branch, whose older brother Charles Estcourt Cresswell rented Pinkney for a time; and to these two is due the preservation of family records.

But Sackville Cresswell lost his only son in infancy and his heir, chosen from among his nephews, was killed in action in

World War I; and eventually it was Herbert Pinkney Cresswell, sixth son of Charles Estcourt (above) who became head of the family.

The misfortune that shadowed Pinkney might have been evaded had Bibury been established as the family seat and the Wiltshire property been sold, but that was not the design in the web of their fortune. The freak opening of the lawsuit prevented it, plus the loss of Sidbury's Hall and in the end the Bibury estate passed to Lord Sherborne.

In 1923 when the last Lord of the Manor of Pinkney and Sherston died unmarried, there was no recognized Cresswell heir to be head of the family and so, the story runs, his elder sister relinquished whatever was left to them of Bibury to rebuild Sidbury. But earlier than that one of the cousins had written to Lord Sherborne (in 1920) for confirmation of a different story: that should Bibury ever be sold, it must first be offered to the Cresswells.

Lord Sherborne instructed his solicitors to investigate, but no information was forthcoming and there the matter ended. Time had obscured the facts; it was all too long ago; family papers had been destroyed and the ill-luck of the 'Pinkney race' held to the end.

In the following year Bibury Court with 3,000 acres was put on the open market, but the winds of change were blowing even then and it was not until a few years later that it was sold with some of the land to the family who now own it.

But what of Pinkney?

William Henry Cresswell (1817–80) married a wife with money, Elizabeth Taylor Mawson and they reared a family of two sons and two daughters known to their acquaintance as 'Handsome Kate' and 'Pretty Elizabeth'.

After their girls were married the parents lived mostly in France where Mrs Cresswell died in 1873. Her husband then married a French wife, held responsible for a wholesale destruction of family papers after his death.

This led to the circulation of improbable stories about the Sackville succession that still survive.

In 1843 when all the Sackville titles became extinct, W. H. Cresswell of Pinkney might have had an interest had he still

been Cresswell of Bibury or able to retrieve his property and prove his legitimised descent from the 1st Earl of Dorset. But the ladies of the family either did not know or would not face that Sir Thomas Sackville of Bibury had been a natural son. Their story was of a deserted wife of the first Sir Thomas Sackville (subsequently Earl of Dorset), who may have died but whose son was a stumbling block for his father's marriage to Cecily Baker and so his legitimacy was denied. Were it so he would have been born *circa* 1553 and the accepted date of his death was 1647. Ninety-four is an unusual span of life and difficult to prove some centuries later.

William Henry Cresswell's second son went to India but died young and in June 1890 the elder, last of his line, sold Pinkney to Colonel W. W. Turner who replaced with his own coat of arms that of Sir Thomas Estcourt and Mary Corbet, his wife, that was above the doorway. It fell into good hands, however, for the whole place was beautifully maintained, the grounds and gardens providing work for eight gardeners.

But revolutions just as compelling as the French Revolution of the preceding century were about to take place and the English way of life was to alter as it had so often done before.

Taxation mounted and Lloyd George brought in his death duties on property; then followed the appalling casualties of the First World War and slowly, irresistably, the tide of domestic revolution silenced for ever, the old, busy, bustling lives of the country houses.

In the 1930s for many years Pinkney lay deserted. A spell of enchantment hung over the lovely old house, but it would seem there was also a more sinister shadow.

S. P. B. Mais in his book *England's Pleasance* wrote of Pinkney in July 1935 as 'a glorious gabled Manor House' that he was told was haunted, 'near the wide green track of the Fosse Way, south-west of Cirencester, that headed straight for Bath'.

Black Dick would often have ridden that way in his Jacobite days.

S. P. B. Mais was told the legend of two disinherited brothers who in the eighteenth century came knocking at the great door, and when their heiress sister opened to them, they stabbed her forthwith; but she, seeing their intention, made one last grab

at the door to get back into safety, alas! too late, but her fingerprints covered in blood made so deep an impression that in spite of washing and repainting they still appeared after 200 years.

Could Elizabeth thus have died in 1717 and so been both ghost and owner of the skull, determined from beyond death not to be parted from her home and heritage—impossible. It is far more likely that she died in childbirth.

But the bloodstains were there, not on the front door, but within. In those far distant days of hot religious feeling, political brawls, heavy drinking and duelling, anything could have happened.

An exciting story could be written round the theme of the disinherited brother, William Estcourt (supposed to have died young) and his accomplice the elder sister's despised husband Cornelius Carter; or it could be put back a century and written round Jane Snigge; but if Pinkney was haunted by Elizabeth Corbet whose death released her dead son's fortune to Mary Estcourt for its aggrandisement, there is a Biblical flavour of Divine retribution.

Probably no one but the actual participants ever knew what really happened. All that has survived is the recalcitrant skull and the legend of two sisters, Mary and Elizabeth.

Later traditions point to the relic having become more of a talisman than a Nemesis.

When Pinkney was sold, workmen were called in for repairs and alterations and strange accidents happened to them which they declared were due to the removal of the skull and they demanded its return.

Eventually the Cresswells were asked to take it away and in the absence of his brother-in-law, the Rev. John Balfour Clutterbuck, Rector of Leighterton, husband of the elder Cresswell sister, rode over to Pinkney for that purpose, but finding the black box in which it had been placed too cumbersome to carry on horseback, he put it under a loose floor-board in an attic, intending to retrieve it later. To his horror he learnt, that true to the legend, the skull had returned as though untouched to its usual place.

Both he and his wife were so shaken that they are believed then to have taken it right away to Sidbury. The family at that

time used the Dower House, an ancient, black and white, timbered, typically Shropshire farmhouse.

All the Cresswell cousins of the early twentieth century believed that the last Richard Cresswell (Cousin Dick) kept the skull in its black box under his bed and that it was to be buried with him. It was even thought that this had been done as there were instructions to that effect, but the relic evaded this fate to reappear rather mysteriously some years later.

Pinkney was considerably altered before World War II, then again it lay empty, for who could staff a haunted house!

Shortly before the War it was bought by an antique dealer, a Mr Bail, who dismantled it and took the staircase, panelling, and everything of value to South Africa and then resold the shell.

But the old house was not dismantled without incident and queer stories, embroidered by the locals, circulated. The local press reported:

> . . . This fine old Elizabethan Manor is now being pulled down and during its long history the house is said to have given many evidences of supernatural phenomena. Occurrences recently are said to confirm local legends. In the Manor was a door, well known to visitors and local people and it bore a handprint supposed to have been that of a murdered man [sic] who fell against it. Everything possible had been done to remove the imprint but it always appeared through the varnish. Once the owner had the door removed and another put in its place, but the new door would never stay shut so the old one was replaced. . . .

The account went on to relate that when the demolition workers took down this door three mysterious accidents happened within half-an-hour. The first man got a nasty cut on his arm, the next had his leg injured by a falling piece of stone and the third got his thumb cut open. All the workmen said they had been seeing things and had felt tugs on their clothing. But despite these protests from the spirit world, the work was accomplished in due course and silence closed down on a ruin.

New owners demolished it and all that remains today is the fine stable block built by Estcourt Cresswell in 1807. Close by stands a new house, built on the site of the former coachman's cottage, and a new Pinkney Park, adapted to the changing

world and shorn of all its old superstitions and legends, faces the future.

The last Squire, Charles Richard Estcourt Cresswell of Pinkney and Sidbury, Lord of the Manors of Sherston and Pinkney, Justice of the Peace, was born in 1842 and in his youth was a Lieutenant in the 3rd Regiment of Foot.

He made no great success of life. The lawsuit dragged on and hereditary possessions and ancient lineage, coupled with straitened means and a strictly mid-Victorian upbringing, proved a heavy handicap; yet he reached 'that unhoped serene that men call age' living much of his life abroad and dying in Algiers in 1923, aged eighty-one.

But he did not escape the freak fortune of the heirs of Pinkney for he was an eccentric, due it was said to a smart blow on the head from a knobkerrie, during the Zulu War. He became very devout—carrying out an abominable restoration of Sidbury Church—and he had a strong aversion for women. So great was his dislike that living in an age of elaborate practical jokes, he had a special seat made in his dogcart with a secret spring, which when released could precipitate unfortunate passengers into the mud.

The dogcart survived within living memory but now alas, has disappeared.

When he died the Lordship of the Manor of Sherston, not sold with Pinkney, devolved on his elder sister, Mrs Clutterbuck, whose name completes the long roll of the holders, which the Cresswells possess, dating back to 1080.

Her only son died childless in 1940 and thus, in the middle of the twentieth century, the conditions of the legend were fulfilled—none of the 'Pinkney race' owned an ell of the domain and the last 'lord of Pinkney' was dead, his lands 'by strangers held in trust' (Bibury?)—and only the skull remained.

Mrs Clutterbuck had rebuilt Sidbury Hall and in 1941 it passed to the present owner, John Reed her grandson, who was also step-grandson to her sister 'pretty Elizabeth', Bessie Reed. Mrs Reed died in 1935 in Southern Rhodesia where her only daughter Mrs George Fleming of Gilston was established. When

John Reed inherited Sidbury, feeling herself to be the last of the old generation and of an old way of life, Mrs Fleming wrote home to ask that the skull might at long last be given a Christian burial—but again the relic showed its independence, for nowhere could it be found, although an extensive search was made.

Could it have been that its guardian angel did not wish it laid to rest in a nameless grave?

During the War the house was taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture and sometime later, on his periodical visit of inspection to the water tank in the attic, the man in charge was startled to observe a small ivory skull facing him on top of it, which most certainly had not been there before. It was reported both to agent and owner but enquiries produced no result and no one could account for its presence, other than that it had been there all the time, hidden in its black box and rendered invisible until the danger of burial had passed.

And at Sidbury it has remained ever since in the safe-keeping of the Reed family, who regard it with genuine but respectful affection. It is believed to be slowly disintegrating over the years since its reappearance.

The large families of the nineteenth century were of course in great part due to the elimination of disease. Smallpox the chief killer was gradually conquered by the vaccine discovered by Dr Jenner of Gloucestershire in the mid-eighteenth century and antiseptics came a hundred years later. Also death was more noticeable and more shattering when it struck grown families and men and boys of adventurous spirit were more likely casualties than their sheltered sisters; but certainly death dealt very harshly with the Cresswell men. The span of life was short for most of the Pinkney grandsons and great-grandsons, whereas the women were remarkably long-lived and this more than anything supported the belief that Pinkney was unlucky. Since the links with Pinkney have all been severed several of the Cresswell men have lived to a ripe old age, the recent head of the family having been a sprightly octogenarian, who is survived

by a brother who also survived, as a young naval surgeon, the tragic sinking of the hospital ship *Rokilla*, 31st October 1914.

It was a curious fate that eliminated the men and boys and spared the women. Over and over again the bread-winner on his way to fortune died, leaving his family in reduced circumstances, or the sons died young, until at long last, when Bibury was irretrievably lost and Pinkney itself demolished, the 'Pinkney race' was finally dispersed.

As a family they were typical of their kind and were characterized by a forthright manner and a reputation for plain speaking: a love of the countryside and of all country pursuits, hunting, shooting, fishing and in India pig-sticking and polo, at all of which they could more than hold their own. They were good at games and likeable people, pulling their weight in public duty and service.

And today their descendants inherit a quiet confidence from the knowledge of a long and romantic descent, knowing themselves to be by grace of God, the heirs of centuries of freedom and responsibility, which induces a fearless approach to life, self-reliance and a zest for adventure, with a tendency to be individual—and an indomitable spirit.

Epilogue

There is no power but God;
The powers that be are ordained of God.

St Paul.

AND NOW, HAVING meandered through eight centuries, following the course of a single stream, what can be made of it, where has it led?

The old country houses changing hands or passing out of existence, where the large families of the nineteenth century were reared, were pools of civilization whence streamed their sons and daughters down the rivers of life, across its oceans to colonize the world.

The family of the Three Squirrels Sejant survives in England, but the Cresswell blood through daughters runs in many others who cherish with affection their attractive symbol.

Some are established on 'broad acres' of their own, carved out in the new world, where they live in their quietly responsible British way, facing an unknown future with a calm authority and flawless courage, for a furrow begun is ploughed to its end.

They are children of splendid pioneers who helped to build the British nation into an Empire, for long the envy and the admiration of the world; and now are the maligned and belaboured target of an intelligentsia that grew to power in the aftermath of two world wars but decried by its successors in its own turn, will also pass away on the stream of time, when it has fulfilled its purpose.

For science in this century is proving the reality of the ancient, fervent, medieval conception, that was shared by rich and poor alike; that an almighty purpose governs the universe by divine law, from its greatest part to its tiniest particle, although full comprehension is still beyond man's puny intellect. Freedom, therefore, is a freedom of choice, to serve in harmony or hate, to seek the individual path through right and wrong to good or evil; to cast the tiny atom that is our natural span of life to the profit of God or turn aside to Satan.

The mysterious strands of genetic inheritance are infinitely varied and are conditioned by environment and education, but a life-line for everyone stretches back, golden and gleaming for nearly 2,000 years. Throughout the centuries a code has been evolved, a pattern for behaviour based on the ideal of the Christian ethic, adjusting to the changing scene in every generation, always beset by the same old sins, but surviving.

This voluntary code with its intrinsic qualities of grace and courtesy remains in danger in the modern world and were it lost there would be a return to the Dark Ages, for men do not thrive without spiritual values and as the great St Augustine taught—the origin of evil is the loss of good.

The Divine purpose for the twentieth century shines clear. Its scientific discoveries point the way to opening up the empty spaces of the world for the benefit of all mankind and it will be accomplished—in an infinite variety of ways, through innumerable lives, and in intricate patterns beyond our comprehension in present time.

The scattered clan of the little red squirrels will make its contribution, for they remember their motto, inherited with Bibury from the great perfectionist family of Sackville and they persevere and are not easily deterred.

'Aut nunquam tentes aut perfice.'

APPENDIX ONE

The Cresswell Descent from the Blood Royal of England through the Estcourts of Pinkney

EDWARD I. Named after Edward the Confessor, b. 17th July 1239, d. 7th July 1307. = (1st wife) ELEANOR OF CASTILE. D. of Ferdinand, King of Castile, d. 27th Nov. 1290.

JOAN OF ACRE; Born 1272 in Acre. = (as 2nd wife) GILBERT DE CLARE, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford, surnamed 'The Red'.

ELEANOR DE CLARE. Imprisoned with her family in the Tower. = HUGH DESPENCER. Summoned to Parliament 1295. Favourite of Edward II who made him Earl of Winchester 1322. Hanged Nov. 1326.

EDWARD DESPENCER. Died 1342. = ANNE. Sister of Henry, Lord FERRERS of Groby, d. 1367.

SIR EDWARD DE SPENCER, K.G. Accompanied the Black Prince to France. Summoned to Parliament as Baron de Spencer, 1357, d. 1375. = ELIZABETH. D. and heir of Bartholomew, Baron BURGHERSH.

MARGARET DE SPENCER (yst. D.). Buried with her husband at Merrivale, d. 1415. = ROBERT FERRERS OF CHARTLEY. d. 1413.

EDMUND FERRERS OF CHARTLEY. = ELIZABETH. D. and co-heir of Sir Thomas de la ROCHE Knt., d. 1439–40.

WILLIAM FERRERS OF CHARTLEY. d. June 1450. = ELIZABETH. D. of Sir Hamon BELKNAP Knt., Treasurer of Normandy, d. May 1470.

ANNE FERRERS. Only D. and heir, buried in the Priory of St Mary Overy, Southwick, d. 11 Ed. I V = 1472. = SIR WALTER DEVEREUX K.G. 7th Baron Ferrers of Chartley, slain at Bosworth 1485.

ELIZABETH DEVEREUX. Buried at Burford 1516. = SIR RICHARD CORBET Knt. of Moreton Corbet (1st husband), d. 1492–93.

SIR ROBERT CORBET Knt. of Moreton Corbet. d. April 1513. = ELIZABETH. D. of Sir Henry VERNON of Haddon, Co. Derby. d. 1563.

SIR ROGER CORBET Knt. of Moreton Corbet. d. 20th Dec. 1538. = ANNE. D. of Andrew, Lord WINDSOR of Stanwell, Middlesex, d. 1543.

SIR ANDREW CORBET Knt. of Moreton Corbet. d. 16th Aug. 1578. = JANE. D. of Sir Robert NEEDHAM of Shenton, Salop., d. 7th Jan. 1577–78.

SIR VINCENT CORBET Knt. of Moreton Corbet (4th son), d. March 1622–23. = FRANCES. D. and heir of William of HUMPHRESTON of Humphreston, Salop., d. 1615–16.

SIR ANDREW CORBET Knt. of Moreton Corbet, d. May 1637. = ELIZABETH. D. of William BOOTHBY of London, sister and heir of Sir Henry Boothby, Bt.

SIR VINCENT CORBET, b. 1617, cr. Bt. 1641–42, m. *c.* 1644, d. Jan. 1656–57. = SARAH 4th D. and co-heir of Sir Robert MONSON of Carleton. Cr. VISCOUNTESS CORBET, d. 1682.

MARY CORBET, eld. D. b. 1656, m. 1677. = SIR THOMAS ESTCOURT of Sherston Pinkney, Wilts., d. 1702.

ELIZABETH ESTCOURT (yr. D.) heiress of Sherston Pinkney. Died 1717. = RICHARD CRESSWELL of Rudge and Sidbury, Salop. M.P. Bridgnorth 1710 and Wootton Bassett 1713. Sold Rudge, d. 1743.

THOMAS ESTCOURT CRESSWELL (yr. S.) of Pinkney and Sidbury. b. 12th July 1712, d. 14th Nov. 1788. M.P. Wootton Bassett 1754–74. = ANNE only child of Edmund WARNEFORD of Sevenhampton, Wilts. and Elizabeth. D. and heiress of Henry Sackville of Bibury, Glos.

ESTCOURT CRESSWELL of Pinkney, Bibury and Sidbury. b. May 1745, d. 4th July 1823. M.P. Cirencester, 1765–74. = 1st. wife. ANNE. D. of Rev. John WOTTON and heiress of S. Wotton Esq. of Speechwick Park, Devon. d. Sept. 1772, leaving a D. Anne. m. Rev. Thomas FRY, Vicar of Radley, Berks. and Emberton, Bucks. (Prendergast ped). 2nd wife.

= MARY GREGORY of Sherston, d. 1815.

RICHARD ESTCOURT CRESSWELL of Bibury, Pinkney and Sidbury, b. 1781, d. 1841. = ELIZABETH. 4th D. of Rev. Charles COXWELL of Ablington, Glos., 1866.

WILLIAM HENRY CRESSWELL of Pinkney and Sidbury (5th son), b. Oct. 1817, d. Feb. 1880. = ELIZABETH Taylor MAWSON. D. of Thomas MAWSON, d. Nov. 1873.

= (2nd wife) MARIE CATHERINE eld. D. of Nicolas Labeille Drusille MIZAUT of Paris. No children.

CHARLES RICHARD ESTCOURT CRESSWELL of Pinkney and Sidbury. b. Oct. 1842, d. 1923. Un-m. Sold Pinkney 1890.

His elder sister Catherine m. 1863 Rev. John Clutterbuck. She inherited Sidbury and the Lordship of the Manor of Sherston. Died 1928. Her son died s.p. 1940 and her grandson John Reed inherited Sidbury in 1941.

ESTCOURT and MARY CRESSWELL m. 14th Aug. 1781 and had seven sons: Richard (see above), Sackville; Henry; Estcourt; Edmund; John; George W. H. and a D. Barbara, d. in infancy. Also a son Thomas Estcourt and a D. Jane (d. in infancy) born before marriage. The present head of the family Major ESTCOURT CRESSWELL of Charingworth Manor descends from George William Howe, yst. son of Estcourt Cresswell and Mary.

APPENDIX TWO

Pedigree of Cresswell of Bilbrook and Barnhurst, Sidbury, Pinkney, and Bibury

Thomas de Cresswell, Sheriff of Staffordshire 1166.

Thomas de Cresswell, a Juror of Stafford 1247.

Thomas de Cresswell of Bilbrook, brother of Sir Henry de Cresswell. Living 1286–1336, married Agnes, D. of Henry de Barnhurst.

Thomas de Cresswell, 1358 (living 1377).

Thomas de Cresswell, Armiger, 1409–65, mentioned by Rudder, *Hist. Glos. 1779.*

Thomas de Cresswell of Bilbrook, 1468–1544, Tenant of Barnhurst. Brother of William Cresswell of Wolverhampton. — b. 1471 = Christiana; John = Jane, D. of Richard Clows or Clears Esq. Salop.; Thomas, *living 1614 Arms recorded* = Elizabeth, D. of Barnsley of Trysull Esq.; Margaret = Thomas Giffard of Whiteladies, Salop. See Arthur Bryant, *Charles II*, Chap. I.

Richard Cresswell I of Barnhurst, 1490–1559, Will proved 20.1.1560, Merchant of the Staple, 'To be Buried in Tettenhall' = Margaret. — and William. Will proved 26.4.1561; Thomas John.

|

Richard Cresswell II of Barnhurst, d. 1612, Will proved 26.11.1612. Merchant of the Staple. 'To be buried in our usual place.' = 1st wife, Joan, D. of John Dyott Esq. of Lichfield. = 2nd wife, Anne Fowke, widow of Walter Grosvenor. — and four daughters.

— William = Priscilla.

| by first wife.

Richard Cresswell III of Barnhurst Esq., 1558–1626. *Living 1614,* Will proved 22.6.1626. = Margery, D. and heir of John Fowke Gunston, Staffs. Esq. — and five daughters

|

Richard Cresswell IV of Barnhurst and — and five daughters.

Rudge, 1620–1708. Page to Charles I. High Sheriff, Salop., 1670. = Anne, step D. of Lea of The Lea, Co. Hereford Esq., half-sister and devisee of Roland Purslow of Sidbury.

Richard Cresswell V of Sidbury, High Sheriff of Salop. 1711. d. 5th Dec. 1723. = Mary, D. of Ed. Moreton of Moreton, Staffs. and Elizabeth Ducie. Sister of the 1st Lord Ducie of Moreton.

Richard Cresswell VI of Rudge and Sidbury. 1688–1743. 'Black Dick.' M.P. Bridgnorth 1710–13. M.P. Wootton Bassett 1713–1715. = Elizabeth Estcourt of Pinkney 1709, d. 1717. — and Elizabeth = Gervase Scrope of Cockerington, Lincs. Esq.

Thomas Estcourt Cresswell of Pinkney and Sidbury, D.L. M.P. Wootton Bassett 1754–57, 1712–1788 = Anne, D. of Edmund Warneford, Sevenhampton Esq. and Elizabeth Sackville of Bibury. — Yr. Brother of Richard 1710–29.

Estcourt Cresswell of Bibury, Pinkney, and Sidbury, and Frances, M.P. Cirencester 1768–74. D.L. J.P. 1745–1823 = 1st wife, Anne Mary, D. of Rev. John Wotton and heir of S. Wotton of Speechwick Park, Devon, d. 1772 leaving D. Anne. = 2nd wife, Mary Gregory of Sherston.

Richard Estcourt of Bibury, Pinkney, and Sidbury, 1781–1841, and Sackville, Henry, Estcourt, Edmund, John, George.

For continuation see Appendix three and four.

The Cresswell daughters of the preceding generations all married and their names are on record.

Family of Richard Estcourt Cresswell

HEIR OF Estcourt and Mary of Pinkney Park, Bibury Court and Sidbury, b. 5th Oct., bapt. 30th Oct. at Bibury, 1781. Called to the Bar of the Inner Temple. m. Elizabeth 4th and yst., D. of Rev. Charles Coxwell of Ablington, Rector of Dowdeswell in 1803. Died 21st March 1841. She died aged 82 in 1866. Memorial in Sherston Church.

SONS:

1. Richard Estcourt m. 1827 d.s.p. April 1837. His widow m. a Polish nobleman.
2. Charles-Atwell-Estcourt d. abroad 1819 d.s.p.
3. Estcourt-Moreton-Corbet drowned at sea as a young Naval Officer 29th Dec. 1836, Un-m.
4. Warneford-Sackville medical student. Drowned in the River Dee at Chester, June 1835.
5. William-Henry succeeded his father as Squire of Pinkney and Sidbury. See Appendix four.
6. George-Wotton died young.

DAUGHTERS:

1. Elizabeth Mary m. her cousin Charles Rogers Coxwell 3rd son of Rev. Charles Coxwell of Ablington, Rector of Dowdeswell (son of above Rev. Charles). Member of Hon. Corps of Gentlemen at Arms 1828–36; D.L. J.P. Malvern. No children.
2. Anne m. at Paris 1830 Francis Kirkham Fowell Esq. (Devon family).
3. Eleanor Francis m. 25th July 1839 George Lewis Cooper Esq. (2nd son of Hon. Sir George Cooper, Judge at Madras) of Torrington Sq, London.
4. Barbara Jane m. William Doidge Taunton Esq.
5. Emma m. 11th Sept. 1832 the Rev. John Thompson.
6. Catherine Margaret m. 30th Aug. 1842 G. T. Ellison Esq. of Lincoln's Inn.

APPENDIX FOUR

Family of William Henry Cresswell of Pinkney and Sidbury, J.P.

Born 1817 m. 1841 Elizabeth Taylor Mawson. She died at St Brieux, Cotes du Nord, Nov. 1873. m. 2ndly Marie Catherine, eld. D. of Nicholas-Labeille-Drusille-Mizaut of Paris 1874. He died 1880. Memorial in Sherston Church.

SONS:

1. Charles Richard Estcourt Cresswell b. 9th Oct. 1842. Lt. 3rd Regt. of Foot. Last Squire of Pinkney and Sidbury, J.P. Lord of the Manors of Pinkney and Sherston. Sold Pinkney 1890. Died in Algiers 1923.
2. Henry Thomas b. Dec. 1848. Died young.

DAUGHTERS:

1. Catherine Purslow m. Rev. John Balfour Clutterbuck, Rector of Leighterton cum Boxwell, Glos. Died 1928 having had a son and 4 daus.
   Son: Richard Wilmot b. in Devon 26th Oct. 1867. Of Zurrantee Tea Estate, Dooars, and later of Sidbury. His wife Alice died in childbirth in India 5th June 1909. He died d.s.p. at Sidbury 1940.
   Daughters:
   1. Frances Catherine Balfour. 'Effie', Mrs Oakes.
   2. Elizabeth Cresswell Balfour d. in infancy 19th Sept. 1865.
   3. Maude Eveline Balfour, Mrs Reed, mother of the present owner of Sidbury.
   4. Mabel Kathleen, Mrs Ranger of Coln Rogers, Glos.
2. Elizabeth Sackville (Bessie) b. 1847 m. at Sherston 9th Feb. 1870 as his 2nd wife, Major John Thomas Leigh Reed, who died 1879. They had one daughter, Ethel, b. 8th Feb. 1873 m. George Fleming of Gilston Estate, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.
   They had a son and 3 daus.
   Son: Richard Morris Fleming, Major, The Black Watch, M.B.E. m. 1947 Gillian Willett and has 2 sons and 2 daus.

Daughters:

1. Catherine Sackville, Mrs James.
2. Elizabeth Cresswell, Mrs D. M. Fleming.
3. Margaret Alison Blackett, Mrs Marshall.

Mrs Fleming died March 1962 aged 89. Her mother Mrs Reed died at Gilston in 1935 aged 88.

Major Reed's first wife had been a sister of Sir Stanley Clarke, connected with the Court and close friend of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, who with his wife assumed guardianship of all the Reed children.

The eldest son of the first marriage m. Maude 3rd D. of Mrs Clutterbuck (above) and had a son John Reed the present owner of Sidbury. He m. Claude Tatou D. of Colonel Pierre Tatou, late Spahi Cavalry and Military Attache at Constantinople, and has two daus. Vivienne and Caroline.

APPENDIX FIVE

Family of George William Howe Cresswell, J.P.

Of Sherston Manor yst. son of Estcourt and Mary b. Aug. 1800 m. Nov. 1826 Sophia Anne, D. of Henry Hulbert of the Manor House, Little Somerford, Wilts. She was born at 16 Cannon St, City of London. Died at Annerley 21st Dec. 1883. He died in Guernsey, buried at St Jaques, 1848. Memorial window in Sherston Church.

Copy of a letter from Henry Hulbert to his father-in-law, W. Stubbs, dated 19th Nov. 1802 and sealed with a wafer—telling of the birth of Sophia Anne:

'Dear Father

I am by the blessing of God favoured with a daughter and I am very glad to inform you Mrs Hulbert has had a very good time and is now exceeding well. Mother intends to come down by the 12clk Coach. I hope this will find you better

I am dr father

Yours H. Hulbert'

Bishop Stubbs of Oxford (1825–1901), the eminent historian was a member of this family and is quoted as having said that when he was a Parson 'I suppose I know every toe of every baby in my Parish'.

SONS:

1. George Edward b. 1829 m. 1868 Mary Emma (D. of J. H. Coxwell) b. 1844 d. 1935 aged 91½). Was a sea captain and his eldest D. was born off the coast of New York. Inherited Sherston Manor. Died 2nd Dec. 1883. (See Ap. six).
2. Charles Estcourt b. 1832 m. Phoebe (D. of J. H. Coxwell) in 1867. (See later.)
3. Henry Stubbs b. 1833 m. 1870 Ermelinda Forester and had 3 sons and 4 daus. (of whom Katie was 1stly Mrs Wibner, 2ndly Mrs Chaine.) Died 1883. His wife's father J. J. Forester was a Portuguese Baron who had a distinguished career in Oporto.
4. Alfred M.D. b. April 1837 in Boulogne. Went into partnership with Dr Baker in South Norwood (then a village) in 1865. Best man at his sister Sophia Anne's wedding to Dr Chaplin 1865. Died suddenly 18th Dec. 1876. His wife, Mary D. of Harry Hayward of Wilsford, Wilts. died 15th April 1907. Their son George Belben Cresswell went out to India and eventually emigrated to Australia. Their D. Edith m. Sidney Barrow 2nd June 1892 and had two sons and a D. Vera m. 1926. Lt-Col Lionel Knight M.C. The Guides and has a son Patrick and a D. Barbara m. Terence Pexton.
5. (William) Sackville Cresswell b. 1843 d. 1909, Hole Park, Rolvenden, Kent and Beacon Hall, Rolvenden. m. Mabel Hurd Aldam of Ardingly, Sussex, 23rd May 1873. Lost his only son and made his nephew Alfred Cresswell his heir. Followed his brother Charles Estcourt to India in 1866. Became a pioneer of the Dooars Tea Industry, founded firm of W. S. Cresswell in Calcutta.
6. Edmund Warneford b. 1847 d. 1861 in Guernsey aged 14.

DAUGHTERS:

1. Emily (eldest child) m. George Belben of Holmwood, Wimbourne, Dorset in 1851 d. 8th May 1889. No children. He died 6th Aug. 1901 aged 77.
2. Sophia Anne m. 1865 Thomas Chaplin M.D. at South Norwood. (See Appendix five c.)
3. Mary Anne (Aunt Polly) d. 29th Aug. 1906 at her brother Sackville Cresswell's home at Rolvenden. Un-m.

APPENDIX FIVE A

Family of George Edward Cresswell

Eldest son of George William Howe Cresswell J.P. m. Mary Emma Coxwell, of Sherston Manor, Wilts.

SON: George Edward b. 1872. Went out to India to the family tea estates. Died un-m. in London 24th July, 1913.

DAUGHTERS:

1. Emma Mary born at sea off coast of New York. Ran away from home with her cousin Lily Cresswell and went out to South Africa. m. April 1898 in Umtali, Southern Rhodesia, James Albert Palmer, member of Cecil Rhodes' Pioneer Column of 1890; he took part in the Jameson Raid and fought in the South African War. d. in Umtali aged 90, 1954. She died aged 91½ in Umtali, 1959. They had 4 sons and 2 daus.

   SONS:

   1. Robert Cresswell Palmer of Kloof, Natal. m. Fanny Louisa Catherine Crookes and has a son James Frederick Crookes Palmer b. 1937 and a D. Patricia Margaret b. 1935 m. 1960 Eric Michael Somerset Oehly.
   2. Estcourt Raymond Buller Palmer, O.B.E. of Umtali, Southern Rhodesia. m. Grace Crawford, D. of another Rhodes Pioneer, friend of his father. Has 2 sons, Cresswell Richard; and 2 daus. Jean, Mrs Ben Barry and Phoebe, Mrs David Hewitt.
   3. Edward John Palmer d. 1963 m. Mary Crawford, sister of Grace. No children.
   4. Geoffry Barham Palmer d. 1943. m. and had a son Michael.

   DAUGHTERS:

   1. Mary m. at Umtali 1936 James Leslie Christie S.A.P.F. d. 1959 has a D. Heather.
   2. Olive Rhoda m. J. F. Begley and has a son James. m. 2ndly Andrew Cunningham Soffe. Lives Portuguese East Africa, near Umtali.

2. Georgina Julia m. 7th March 1893 Charles Naesmyth Harry Edwin Webb b. 14th Nov. 1869, who succeeded to the title of The Naesmyth of Posso (Peebleshire). d. Aug. 1963 aged 93. She died aged 83, 30th Nov. 1953.
   SON: The Rev. George Cresswell Naesmyth b. Oct. 1895 of the Parsonage, Southwick, Nr Fareham, Hants. m. Christabel Sara D. of Thomas Reginald Slatter 1935 and has a son Richard William and a D. Jacynth.
   DAUGHTER: Sackville Webb.
3. Clare (Birdie) m. 8th Dec. 1900 at Jalpaiguri, India, William Norman Price of Chulsa Tea Estate, Dooars, and had one son Alfred Norman Cresswell Price b. 1903 m. 1930 Margerie Katherine Grace Goss.

Mrs Palmer inherited Sherston Manor from her brother and because of the tradition of ill-luck associated with Sherston and Pinkney she sold it out of the family in 1914. Family portraits and heirlooms went to her cousin Herbert Cresswell. (Charingworth Manor.)

APPENDIX FIVE B

Family of Charles Estcourt Cresswell

2nd son of George William Howe Cresswell J.P. and Mary Emma Coxwell, of Sherston Manor, Wilts. b. Sherston 6th Jan. 1832 m. 14th Sept. 1867 Phoebe 3rd D. of J. H. Coxwell d. 1893. Went out to India and became head of Merchant firm of Moran and Co. Calcutta. Resident for some years at Pinkney Park, subsequently of Leckhampton Hall, nr Cheltenham.

SONS:

1. Estcourt Coxwell Henry (Harry) b. 1870 d. un-m. Calcutta, Jan. 1916. Was a renowned Pig-sticker.
2. Arthur John b. 1872. Went out to Tea in India. Retired 1911. m. July 1926 Constance Norah Edith, D. of Henry G. Lindesay and had a D. Susan Lindesay Cresswell. He died 16th Nov. 1940.

3. William Warneford b. 1875 (Harlequin and Middlesex three-quarter) m. 1914 Marjorie, 3rd D. of J. Russell King J.P. of Honnington Hall, Shipston-on-Stour and had one son, Warneford Estcourt d.s.p. 1962 and 3 daus. Elizabeth b. Nairobi 1915; Jane b. 1920; Margaret. He died 25th Sept. 1959.
4. Alfred Ernest Sackville b. 1878 Capt East Kent Regt., The Buffs. Killed in action at St Eloi, France, 1915. Was the heir of his uncle, Sackville Cresswell J.P.
5. Charles Sackville b. 1880 d. un-m. 1942.
6. Herbert Pinkney Cresswell M.B.E. of Charington Manor, Chipping Campden, Glos. b. 1881 d. 1962. Heir of his brothers Alfred and Harry. m. Euphemia J.P. who d. 1949. D. of David Andrews J.P. W.S. widow of T. B. A. Clark of Cowley Manor, Chapelton, Yorks., and had a son and a dau. Became head of the family and holder of the Family Arms.

   SON: Estcourt Richard Cresswell, Major, M.C. XV XIX The King's Royal Hussars. b. 29th March 1923 m. March 1960 Gillian Mabelle Beauclerk, D. of Brig. C. G. Maude D.S.O. O.B.E. M.C.

   DAUGHTER: Phoebe b. 26th Oct. 1924 m. April 1949 Major David Kerr M.C. D.L. J.P. of Whitefarland West, Greenock, Renfrewshire and has a son David and a D. Diana.
7. Richard Corbet b. 1884 d. in New Zealand 1951. No issue.
8. Thomas Hungerford b. 4th Dec. 1889. L.M.S.S.A. M.R.C.S. L.R.C.P. D.O. Oxon. Surgeon Lieut. R.N. No issue. Of Apley Manor, Wragby, Lincs.

DAUGHTERS:

1. Phoebe Emily (Lily) b. 1868. Ran away with her cousin, Emma Mary Cresswell. m. J. G. Johnstone of Lorne Station, New Zealand. d. 1934, leaving a son, Warneford, d. 1945 and two daus.
2. Ethel Susan b. 1874 d. 1884.
3. Gertrude Celia b. 1876 m. 1907 Theodore Frederick Tracy and had one D. Barbara Adelaide d. in infancy. Died 1949.
4. Emma Maud m. Lt-Col C. E. Gilbert I.M.S. 1898 and had a son Clarence (Jack) b. 1899 m. 1935 Joan Helen Kerr Duncan (Arundel) has one dau. and a son. She died 26th June 1953.
5. Agnes Sophia b. 1888 m. Gerald Owain Trevaldwyn, Tea Planter in Ceylon in April 1910 and had two sons and a dau. Died April 1962. SONS: David Estcourt M.C. b. 1916. Owain Cresswell, Capt. b. 1920. D. Joan Gertrude Cresswell. b. 1912.
6. Barbara Jane b. 1885 d. in infancy.

APPENDIX FIVE C

Family of Sophia Caroline

D. of George William Howe Cresswell of Sherston Manor. m. 1865 Thomas Chaplin M.D., M.R.C.S., L.C.A. of the English Mission Hospital, Jerusalem, where all their children were born (and baptized with water from the Jordan).

1. Emily Adah Sophia b. 12th Nov. 1867 m. 2nd March 1896 in St Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta, Lewis Pugh Evans Pugh, Bar-at-Law, K.C. eldest son of Lewis Pugh Pugh of Abermaed, Cardiganshire, Advocate General Bengal, M.P. Cardiganshire, J.P. b. 19th April 1865 d. in London 24th July 1940. She died at Urrard, Perthshire 29th Aug, 1953.
   SON: Lewis Griffith Cresswell Evans Pugh b. 29th Oct. 1909 m. 1939 Josephine, yr. D. of Sir Felix Cassel Bt and has three sons and a dau. Physicist, British Medical Council, Member of the victorious Everest Expedition 1953, Scientific organizer of Sir Edmund Hilary's Geophysical Expedition, 1960.
   DAUGHTERS: Veronica, Gwladys, Phyllys, Rosamunde and Ruth, who all married.
2. Alfred William Cresswell Chaplin b. 15th Dec. 1868 m. at St Paul's Cathedral, Calcutta in 1906 Georgina Forbes, D. of G. F. Lough of Bermuda and New York. She died 2nd Feb. 1959. He died 21st Feb. 1934. Joined his uncle, Sackville Cresswell, in India in Tea and made a large fortune. Retired to Lynwood, Ascot.
   SON: (Alfred) Richard Sackville Cresswell b. 1907. Married twice but d.s.p. 23rd Oct. 1950. Survived by his widow June Chaplin.
3. Elizabeth Charlotte Maude b. 1870 d. 1872.
4. Janet Mabel b. 10th Jan. 1873 d. 15th July 1939 in British Columbia. m. late in life as his second wife George Treffry Corfield of Cowichan, Vancouver Island. Bequeathed her property in Br. C. to her niece Veronica Lloyd née Pugh.

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